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Culinary Tour Organizations in Türkiye**

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Food tourism has developed enormously in recent years. Food is a crucial factor for the competitiveness of any tourist destination. As it is known, the food reflects the culture, tradition and values of a destination. Türkiye has a vibrant value of culinary tourism potential and history. Each region has its own product diversity. Diversification of food is an attractive factor for tourists to visit a destination. Dining and wine tasting activities are essential for travellers because they enjoy tasting and experiencing local and cultural dishes. This study aims to evaluate and understand the current status of culinary tour organizing travel agencies in Türkiye. Culinary tour routes are evaluated in each travel agency, and the participants were directors, owners and general managers of those travel agencies located in İstanbul, İzmir, Marmaris, Gaziantep, Hatay and Adana.

Keywords: *Food tourism, Culinary destinations, Travel industry, Food culture, Türkiye*

Introduction

It is a well-established fact that food is a cultural tool and reflects the traditions and values of a country (İrigüler & Güler, 2017). It is considered as an attraction in a destination (Du Rand, 2006). Food culture is the most appealing factor for tourists to visit a destination. The culinary culture of a country increases tourist vacation pleasure, and enjoyment (Aydoğdu, Özkaya Okay & Köse, 2016). Local cuisine is the main ingredient for tourists' experiences (Gürbaşıkan Akyüz, 2017).

Culinary tourism is a kind of travel made for a food and beverage experience in different cultures (Ekerim, 2020). Wine tourism is a sub-type of Culinary Tourism. Visiting vineyards and tasting wine is special activities in wineries (UNWTO, 2019).

UNWTO (2019) states that wine and food tourism contribute promoting destinations as a brand. The Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness of UNWTO emphasizes that culinary tourism is characterized by the tourist's experience about food and wine activities during their trip. For Committee, visiting local producers, participating cooking workshops and food festivals also include in culinary tourism. In addition, culinary tourism based on learning, tasting, knowing and searching the food culture of any destination (UNWTO, 2019).

Culinary tourism is a part of cultural tourism which creates motivation for tourist to taste different foods (İrigüler & Güler, 2017; Büyükşalvarcı & Akkaya, 2018). It enhances the appeal of a destination (Du Rand, 2006). With the change in individuals' understanding of the holiday, their interest in culinary tourism has increased (Ekerim, 2020). Additionally, culinary tourism provides the promotion of the country or region in which it is made. It ensures that the food culture, recipes and cuisine of that region are introduced to people.

Gastro tourists like joining food tours, food events and food activities (Gürbaşıkan Akyüz, 2017). They visit a specific destination for eating and drinking activities (İrigüler & Güler, 2017). Gastro tourists choose culinary tours to discover different foods that are not available everywhere. They are passionate and curious about food and beverage culture in every destination. (Büyükşalvarcı & Akkaya, 2018). They travel to find great, delicious and different tastes about other traditions. (Tan, 2021). They have the leisure time, sufficient money, willingness and motivation to go to another country to taste food (Büyükşalvarcı & Akkaya, 2018). Gastro tourists pay attention to the quality of the restaurants they go to (Ekerim, 2020). Hygiene is at the forefront of them. They mostly prefer to eat at famous and Michelin star restaurants.

Society of Gastronomy Tourism and Xsights Research Company researched culinary tourist profile (Xsights, 2017). Research shows that culinary tourists spend more money than tourists (Xsights, 2017). America has the most prominent tourism industry, and it appears that tourists spend more money in that country than any other touristic locations. Other countries where tourists spend the most money are China, Spain, France and the United Kingdom (Xsights, 2017). Birder and Akgöl (2015) made an analysis of gastronomic experiences of foreign tourists who visit Türkiye. This study aims to evaluate foreign tourists' culinary experience in Türkiye. Results show that tourists visit Türkiye because of history and Turkish

cuisine. Turkish cuisine was the third reason among the other reasons to visit Türkiye. Satisfaction with Turkish cuisine did not differ according to gender, education level, and marital status or being a parent. Most of the respondents of the survey (93%) said that they would give information on the Turkish gastronomy to their friends and families when they return to their country (Birdir and Bingöl, 2015).

Relationship between Gastronomy and Tourism

When we look at the definition of gastronomy, Sünnetçioğlu and Özkök, (2017) defines that it is the transformation of food and beverage culture in science and art. Gastronomy and tourism elements are agriculture, culture and tourism (Göker, 2011). It is the primary factor for travellers to see, taste, and experience a destination's different flavours (Zağralı, 2014). Culinary heritage increases tourist attention to destination image (Yarış, Çakar & Akyol, 2019). Eating healthy food, preparing an organized dinner table and cooking delicious dishes are other definitions of gastronomy (Sünnetçioğlu, Özkök, 2017). It is the primary tool in sustainable tourism (Gülen, 2017). Another meaning is the journey of appealing and delicious food, which involves the harmonious of serving the right wine with the right food. It can be said that gastronomy is serving food with the right serving equipment and hygiene is the most important rule in gastronomy (Ekerim, 2020).

Culinary tourism, wine tourism and food tourism are other definitions of gastronomic tourism. Understanding the culture of the region and eating regional food is the essential activities in gastronomy tourism. Eating at Michelin star restaurants, tasting famous chef's dishes and following the production process of food is also included in gastronomic tourism (Soydan & Seçilmiş, 2020).

Gastronomy is a strategic sector that contributes to employment in tourism sector, and it creates value for the entire value chain to produce local products (UNWTO, 2019). The use of local products provides economic and social development (Can Özcan & Akkaya, 2019). In addition, gastronomy becomes more valuable with the tourists. Moreover, increasing interest in food has strengthened gastronomy and tourism relationship (UNWTO, 2019).

Food tourism is a new and additional sector in travel and tourism business. It is an alternative tourism type. Moreover, food tourism is an important source of marketable experiences for the traveller, and it increases destination competitiveness. It is the main element for destination tourism promotion (Du Rand, 2006). Destinations are now developing strategies for the region's culinary identity to attract more tourist (UNWTO, 2019). So, gastronomy has become an essential element for tourism destinations.

Culinary tourism increases the tourist attraction to a region (Ekerim, 2020), so it provides a competitive advantage to the destination (Zağralı, 2014). It is the key element for destination brand image (UNWTO, 2019). It is crucial for local tourism promotion (Baruah, 2016). Local products importance increases because travellers want to taste and buy local products to experience the culture of a region (Du Rand, 2006). In addition, regional food is great potential for sustainability of a region.

Increasing the destination image in the tourist mind and develop agricultural, social, economic and environmental growth of a destination are the advantages of culinary tourism (Baruah, 2016).

Agriculture, culture and tourism are main elements of gastronomy. Developing the culinary identity of cities contributes to gastronomy tourism. Exploring new cuisine and participating food trips are also included in culinary tourism. In addition, a local food product represents the citizens lifestyle and traditions of that destination. Gastronomy tourism is not dependent on the seasons and tourist can join Gastronomic tours in all time (Dağdelen, 2020).

Culinary tourism aims to taste food and beverages in different cultures by travelling (Can Özcan & Akkaya, 2019). The use of food and beverage products contributes culturally, socially and economically to culinary tourism. In addition, culinary tourism provides information about the culture of a society. Therefore, culinary tourism is to understand the culture of a region and to taste different foods and beverages.

Unesco Creative Cities Network in the World

Food is the key element for attracting tourists to any destination because tourists look deeper inside other countries' cultures (Baruah, 2016). Also, it is an intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2020). Strengthening a region's hospitality identity and sustaining cultural heritage are the primary roles of food tourism (Baruah, 2016).

UNESCO Creative Cities Network was established in 2004. Gastronomy, literature, music, film, design and art are the themes of this network and it includes 36 city UNESCO, 2020).

Culinary Tourism Development in Türkiye

The variety of products in Asian and Anatolian lands, cultural interaction and dinner invitations given in Ottoman palaces have affected Turkish cuisine (Girgin et al., 2017). Mutton and dairy products were the main foods in Asian and Anatolian lands (Girgin et al., 2017). Milk is the main ingredient for the production of cheese, yoghurt, butter and milky desserts. "Meat and fermented dairy products in Central Asia, grains of Mesopotamia, vegetables, and fruits from the Mediterranean and spices of South Asia have been effective in enriching Turkish food culture." (Önçel 2015, s. 34).

During the Seljuk period, food waste and traditional foods were in the foreground with the influence of Islam (Girgin et al., 2017). Meat, flour and oil were widely used in the Seljuk period (Önçel, 2015). Seljuks developed dishes made up of these ingredients, and also cooking and preserving food was done during the Seljuk period (Önçel, 2015).

Turkish cuisine developed in the Ottoman period (Önçel, 2015). In this period, the Ottoman Empire dominated the vast geographical area, and different cultures were together; consequently, this diversification of cultures brought different food

cultures to Turkish cuisine (Girgin et al., 2017). Turkish cuisine had a significant role in the Ottoman palace (Önçel, 2015). During the Ottoman period, different dishes were tried and produced for the sultan. The chefs have increased the variety of food and desserts for the food feasts in the palace. Chefs producing different recipes for food feasts, and they have competed with each other. The role of Ottoman palace cuisine had a crucial role in developing Turkish cuisine culture (Girgin et al., 2017). Characteristics of Turkish cuisine are based on beef and vegetables, and the food differs according to the region; every region has its cooking techniques. Olive oil and onion are used in all dishes (Önçel, 2015). The factors affecting the Turkish cuisine culture are as follows; (Kızıldemir, Öztürk & Sarıışık, 2014):

- Turkish people started settled life, and they started agriculture
- Different cultures interaction
- Diversification of dishes in every region according to the variety of products
- Organizing traditional mass dining ceremonies
- Geographical discoveries, development of mass media and development food industry

The inter-cultural interaction, the richness of food in every region and the existence of different ethnic groups have enabled the development of the Turkish cuisine culture (Girgin et al., 2017).

Culinary Routes in Türkiye

The food and beverage sector holds the largest share of Türkiye's tourism revenues. It has been observed that tourists coming to Türkiye spend \$ 157 on food and beverage. 82.2% of the incoming tourists emphasize the importance of eating and drinking in their destination selection. The food and beverage industry has a large share in tourism revenues in Türkiye. The share of food and beverage expenditures, which is also ahead of accommodation and ranked first, in total income varies between 20 and 25 per cent (TÜRSAB, 2014). Culinary tourism in Türkiye has not improved to the desired level because sea-sun-sand tourism is more critical than Gastronomic tourism for Türkiye (Bucak & Aracı, 2013). According to the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Index, Türkiye is the 44th globally (Xsights, 2017). Türkiye should differentiate them and develop culinary tourism policies. Turkish cuisine is rich compared to other countries. Each region has its unique vegetables, dishes and spices. This diversity should be introduced to the whole world (Xsights, 2017).

Main activities in culinary tours are; tasting local wines and foods, visiting local cheesemakers, participating in cooking classes, visiting local olive oil producers and participating in local festivals (Güzel Şahin & Ünver, 2015).

Gastro Go Türkiye (2020) publish culinary routes for Türkiye in their website. Some cities that they mention are Edirne, Tekirdağ, İzmir, Urla, Alaçatı Hatay, Safranbolu, Trabzon, Kayseri, Konya, Erzurum. Gaziantep, Antakya, Mardin and Van (Gastro Go Türkiye, 2020). Wine flavours are very rich in Türkiye (Go Türkiye

Tourism, 2021). In Türkiye, there are a lot of local wine producers. These local producers start to present themselves to the world. Popular wine routes are Bozcaada, Urla, Çerkezköy, Kırıklareli, Tekirdağ, Serköy, Ankara, Kalecik, Nevşehir, Tokat and Elazığ (Go Türkiye Tourism, 2021).

Türkiye has a different variety of olive and olive oil. Türkiye is in fourth place to produce olive oil (Cankül & Ezenel, 2018). Olive oil- producing areas are Aydın, Balıkesir, Bursa, Çanakkale, İzmir, Manisa and Muğla (Go Türkiye Tourism, 2021). Olive oil tastings also became popular in Türkiye. Türkiye's olive oil quality is higher than in some other world countries' brand. Local oil producers start to present themselves to the world. They know that they have a high quality of olive oil and present their olive oil to the world. If they present themselves to the world, their production capacity will increase.

Methodology, Aim and Sample of the Research

This research aimed to investigate the current status of culinary tour organizing travel agencies in Türkiye. The research is important as it reveals the thoughts of culinary tour organizing travel agency owner/managers', regarding the content, type and future of culinary travels in Türkiye; thus, it supports the development of culinary tourism in Türkiye and related literature. The travel agencies organizing culinary tours were searched on the web and as a result of these searches 40 travel agencies organizing culinary tours were attained and these travel agencies were reached by mail and phone. Six of the 40 travel agencies said that they cancelled their culinary tours due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and 10 agreed to participate in the study. The remaining 24 travel agencies did not make any returns. Participants were directors, owners and general managers of those travel agencies located in İstanbul, İzmir, Marmaris, Gaziantep, Hatay and Adana. Codes of the agencies are TA1, TA2, TA3, TA4, TA5, TA6, TA7, TA8, TA9, TA10.

Data Collection Instrument

As a qualitative research technique, face to face interview method is used in this research. Using this method is to get accurate information about the subject through the comments made by experts in culinary tourism in line with their knowledge. Participants were directors, owners and general managers in the travel agencies, and the interviews were conducted on Skype. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour Table 1 demonstrates the participants' profiles and interview agenda.

Table 1. *Participants' Profile and Dates of Interviews*

AGENCY CODE	LOCATION	INTERVIEWEE	DATE of INTERVIEW
(TA1)	İSTANBUL	OWNER	8.11.2020
(TA2)	MARMARİS	GENERAL MANAGER	6.11.2020
(TA3)	İSTANBUL/ İZMİR	MANAGER	6.11.2020
(TA4)	İZMİR	OWNER	5.11.2020
(TA5)	ADANA	MANAGER	9.11.2020
(TA6)	İZMİR	GENERAL MANAGER	9.11.2020
(TA7)	İSTANBUL	OWNER	9.11.2020
(TA8)	İSTANBUL	MANAGER	13.01.2020
(TA9)	GAZİANTEP	OWNER	15.01.2020
(TA10)	HATAY	MANAGER	17.01.2020

Interview questions are as follows:

1. What is your point of view on culinary tours in Türkiye?
2. Which is the most popular culinary tour in your agency and Why? Which criteria do you consider in making the tour routes?
3. What are the reasons for tourists to prefer culinary tours in Türkiye? (Şahin & Tosun, 2019)
4. Is the marketing of culinary tours in Türkiye done effectively? What are the shortcomings? Do you have further suggestions?
5. According to which criteria did you choose the restaurants of your culinary tours?
6. What are your suggestions for new culinary tour routes in Türkiye?
7. What are your thoughts on the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on culinary tourism?
8. What are the innovations and changes brought by COVID-19 pandemic to culinary tourism?
9. Which strategies should Türkiye follow in culinary tourism sector after COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Findings

Participants' Point of View on Culinary Tours in Türkiye

The first question is, what is your point of view on culinary tours in Türkiye? TA1 explains that “*People taste and experience the different flavours in culinary tours. A culinary tour is to experience different restaurants' food culture during the trip. Also, tourists meet new tastes during the tour.*” TA4 emphasizes that “*Türkiye is a country with incredible diversity in terms of culinary tourism. Culinary tourism*

is a type of tourism with a very high value. Every region has its own product diversity and its own culture. Despite such diversity and richness, the importance is given to sea-sand-sun tourism instead of culinary tourism.” TA4 invited a Michelin star chef from Spain, Elena Arzak, to taste Turkish traditional dishes and spices from various regions. She tastes sumac, and she likes it. She buys sumac from Türkiye, and she used it in her Michelin star restaurant. TA4 added that *“It is an honour that Turkish spice is used abroad and Turkish food culture expands to the world.”* According to TA3, *“Experience is the key factor for tourists to choose a destination. It states that tourists change their holiday routine in recent years before tourists preferred to rent a summer house during summer, but now, tourists' perception has changed, and they want to go to a destination twice only to taste the dishes. Tourist can recognise a new culture with their food. The characteristics of the place, local flavours and local life have become more critical than others.”* TA5 highlights that *“Culinary tours are top-rated for a few years. Tourists first look at food places in a destination. Culinary tourism means to experience new cultures, traditions and foods in the region. Tourist prefer same place as twice to taste local dishes.”* TA2 said that *“Culinary tours are top-rated for a few years. Turkish people like eating and drinking. In addition to that food tourism becomes popular with social media and cooking programs.”* TA8 states that *“The culinary tour means for me once in a lifetime. It refers to experiencing a different cuisine. It is to have a meal you have never eaten in your life. It means dining at a restaurant where food and wine match.”* TA6 states that *“Culinary tour means tasting the best regional food with a celebrity chef. The participation of celebrity chefs makes culinary tours more meaningful. With their experience, visitors gain more knowledge of local food.”* TA7 states that a *“Culinary tour is inside a cultural tour, and it is a complement of cultural tours. It means tasting local flavours, dishes and spices of a destination. Culinary tourist travels to experience different tastes in a destination.”* TA9 states that *“Culinary tourism has always been an existing type of tourism. At first, it was part of cultural tours. As people's interest in food culture grew, gastronomy began to develop as a type of tourism. Different civilizations and cultures live in Türkiye. Each region has its own unique dishes. In addition, interest in culinary tourism has increased with social media.”* TA10 states that *“Although we are in very rich geography in terms of taste and food variety as a country, I think that enough culinary tours are not organized, and the introduction of culinary tours is not done effectively.”* According to participant agencies, culinary tourism is to taste regional foods and recognise new culture of a destination. TA6 think that celebrity chefs can participate culinary tours to express the culinary culture of a visited destination. TA2 and TA5 emphasizes that individual's interest in culinary tourism has increased for few years. TA4 emphasizes that sea-sun-sand tourism comes to the first side for municipalities which is also an essential policy for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Cultural diversity, cultural foods and a variety of spices are changing in every region of Türkiye. Turkish tourism policies should proof this variety and present Turkish dishes all over the world. TA3 states that experience new culture become more important for tourist nowadays. TA7 and TA3 opinions are same, tourists choose the same destination for twice for only taste local foods.

Popular Culinary Tours in Participant Agencies

The second question is, which is the most popular culinary tour in your agency and why? Which criteria do you consider in making the tour routes? TA1 replies, “*Mardin, Midyat, Urfa, Gaziantep, Adana, Hatay, are the most popular culinary tours in our agency. Tourists want to experience different flavours and spices in these regions. The holiday concept is different for each person. Some people like shopping, some like visiting cultural places. We create a tour route that appeals to everyone.*” TA2 emphasizes that “*Adana, Antep and Hatay are the most popular cities for culinary tours. These culinary cities are also popular worldwide. These places become popular with social media.*” People who go to these places put photos on social media. Their friends see these photos, and they want to go to these places. “*We prepare tour routes by looking at popular tour companies. Tour routes are created by considering the popularity of the city in social media.*” TA3 states that “*Antakya, Gaziantep, Van are the most popular culinary tour routes in our agency. Kırıkclareli and Bozcaada wine tours are also popular for tasting wine. In these cities, there is much variety of food, meat and spices. Turkish people like kebab, künefe and baklava too much, which is why these cities are more popular than others. While creating the routes, the local and cultural richness of places is taken into consideration. We also prefer a restaurant from grandfather to grandchild.*” TA4 states that “*Antakya, Gaziantep and Kastamonu are popular as culinary tours. Hotels and restaurants are the main elements for culinary tourism in a destination. In Anatolian cities, most destinations do not have a restaurant because citizens do not have eating habits at restaurants.*” TA4 emphasizes that “*When we organize tours to Anatolian, we inform hotels and hosts to prepare meals in advance. For us, the accessibility of a destination, comfortability of hotels and local foods are important for making tour routes.*” Antakya and Gaziantep culinary tours are preferred in TA5, as the taste of the food in these cities is more suited to Turkish people’s palate. Social media is a crucial indicator of these places to become more popular. TA5 adds that “*Uniqueness, famousness and local foods are vital for us to make tour routes.*” TA6 highlights that tours vary according to season. In September, Urla is preferred. In summer Çeşme, Alaçatı and Bodrum is the most popular destinations. In December, tourist interest in Kaz Mountains and Bergama. TA6 highlights that “*We put undiscovered places while creating tour routes. We create tour routes according to the demands and tastes of people.*” TA7 indicates that “*Antakya, Mardin and Gaziantep are very popular as they are widely talked about on social media. Turkish people like kebab and baklava.*” Special dishes and local delicacies are important for planning tour routes. TA7 states that “*Our agency chooses places that appeal to everyone.*” TA8 states that “*An important point that we pay attention to tour routes is time- saving. We aim to show people more places in less time. We choose the best quality and popular restaurants. Urfa, Mardin, Antakya, Adana and Gaziantep are the most preferred tour routes, as it is possible to find a wide variety of products and meals in these regions. Moreover, breakfast in these regions is particularly rich, and there are a wide variety of spices. Kars has become an important culinary destination for the last 5-6 years.*” TA9 states that “*We organize tours to Gaziantep, Adana, Antakya, Mardin, Adiyaman and*

Urfa. Different food cultures attract people's attention in these culinary routes, and these destinations also popular on social media. I always go and try restaurants before I choose them. I do not take anyone to places that I have not tried." TA10 emphasizes that *"Antakya and Gaziantep are among the most preferred tours. The reason for choosing these routes is that they preserve their food culture and flavours for years. Cities where history, culture and taste are together, are evaluated on the tour routes."* In ten agencies, mostly Antakya, Gaziantep, Adana Mardin, Urfa and Gaziantep are preferred as culinary tours. Only TA6 give different answers to popular culinary tours because TA6 prefers to arrange tours according to seasonality. In addition, most of the agencies think that social media make Antakya, Hatay, Gaziantep and Adana popular. Also, municipalities have a role in encouraging Hatay, Adana and Antep in social media. Wine tasting routes are preferred only in TA3. Localness, accessibility, restaurant appearance, and taste of food are more common criteria in making tour routes.

The Reasons of Tourists to Choose Culinary Tours in Türkiye

The third question is, what are the reasons for tourists to prefer culinary tours in Türkiye? (Şahin & Tosun, 2019). TA1 states that tourists want to experience different tastes, cultures and traditions. *"They go to the same places for tasting their meals. Taste has an important point where everyone is conscious. In every region of Türkiye, it has a different culture and diversity of products. People come to experience this culture."* TA2 emphasizes that *"Tasting different and unique flavours is very important for tourists to experience the region's culture. Those searching for real taste do not prefer tourism companies, and they travel by themselves."* TA3 specifies that *"Culture and flavour come first for the tourist. Vacation trends are changing nowadays. Once upon a time, everyone had a summer house. In summer, all family goes there. Now it has changed and exploring new culture and flavours comes to the first side for tourists."* TA4 highlights that *"Season- sand tourism is no longer a priority for people. Everyone in the world wants to travel with a theme and story. People want to know the cuisine of a country."* The number of people travelling for food is growing steadily. People want to see different aspects of a destination. Türkiye is a prosperous country in terms of product diversity and culture. TA6 states that *"Tourist vacation habits are changing. Demand for all-inclusive hotels has decreased. The open buffet started to not appeal to people and eating the same food started to be unpleasant every day. We want to spend our money on flavours that give us more pleasure. When people go somewhere, they first look where they can eat. For every destination, they first want to taste the unique flavour of that region."* TA7 and TA9 emphasize that *"Tourist wants to experience different dishes. If you are going for a culinary tour, the food in these popular places is very different and delicious. The point we call that even the taste of the meat was different."* TA8 indicates that *"Türkiye culinary culture is different from all over the world. There are different types of products in every region of Türkiye. Each region has its own unique flavours. Breakfast culture is ignored abroad. "Croissants and coffee are generally consumed in the morning. However, in Türkiye, eggs, olives, cheese selections and green herbs are consumed*

at the breakfast.” TA10 states that “Türkiye is a prosperous country in terms of history and culture. Each region has its own flavours and traditions. Tourists prefer our country to see this cultural and flavour heritage.” So, tourists prefer Türkiye culinary tours because Türkiye has cultural diversity, different flavours and tastes. TA4, TA6 and TA3 opinions are the same. They said that tourists’ perspective on vacation is changed. Story and experience are on the first side for tourists. All travel agencies think that tourists choose Türkiye for its unique cultural diversity and different variety of products.

Marketing of Culinary Tours

The fourth question; is the marketing of culinary tours in Türkiye done effectively? What are the shortcomings? Do you have further suggestions? TA1 criticises that *“The marketing of Turkish culinary tours is not done effectively. Most of the tv channels prepare culinary tour shows. These shows are not published on unpopular channels. Suppose cooking shows are made on popular channels and everyone watches. It is a useful marketing tool for a destination image.”* TA2 states that *“Cities are promoted through festivals and fairs. Alaçatı, Adana, Antep and Herb Festival is very popular with the help of social media channels. Sea-sun-sand tourism is prevalent in Türkiye. Local Turkish dishes do not show to tourists. They only know open buffet Turkish meals. Promotions should be made on the diversity of our Turkish food culture in foreign countries. Municipalities role is critical to promote cities.”* TA3 emphasizes that *“Turkish culinary tours are not promoted abroad. We should increase the promotion of local Turkish flavours all over the world. Tourists who come to Türkiye mostly prefer all-inclusive five-star hotels. They stay at a hotel all day, and they do not prefer to spend too much money.”* TA4 emphasizes that organising culinary tours with Michelin Star chefs attract more tourists to our country. Also, TA4 states that *“Sea-sand-sun tourism is more prominent due to government policies. Travel agencies and restaurant owners cannot make advertisements on their own. Culinary tourism should be included in the tourism policy of the state. For several years, the ministry has been paying attention to and supporting activities such as festivals and congresses. We can say that it started to develop. International chefs need to taste the local flavours and spices of our country.”* TA5 emphasizes that *“The same places are always promoted domestically. Festivals play an important role in marketing the culinary tours. Interest in Adana and Gaziantep has increased with the festivals. There is an excellent variety of food in Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia, but these places are not promoted. Municipalities should increase the marketing of these places by arranging congress and festivals.”* TA6 highlights that *“There are deficiencies in marketing the culinary tours. There are many unexplored and unknown places. Too much advertising on television and social media does not show that this job is being done well. The popularity of culinary tours is increasing in Türkiye; however, it is important to know who is behind the organization of the tours. Individual advertising is not enough; thus, Support of municipalities and the Ministry of Tourism is also important. Everyone is going to Hatay, Gaziantep, Adana, as these places are frequently being promoted in Türkiye. We need to highlight different*

places.” TA7 states that *“The same locations are always promoted for culinary tours. There are so many unknown places, even in Istanbul. There are many unknown places in Anatolia. If you stop people on the street and ask what comes to your mind first as a culinary tour. They answer this question with Antep, Adana and Hatay. If the Ministry of Tourism invited agencies from different regions of Türkiye and asked them to introduce different regions in their agencies, agencies may add other regions to their regions, and the promotion of these regions can increase.”* TA8 states that *“Advertisements are sufficient. The promotion of Southeastern Anatolia and nearby places in Syria needs to be advertised more.”* TA9 emphasizes that *“The Ministry of Tourism attends fairs at home and abroad, but they do not attend fairs with professional people. Turkish cuisine should be introduced by professionals in the best way possible. Fairs are places where business contacts are made. Participants in the fairs should be looked at, what they liked and where they came from, and promotions should be made accordingly. It is very important to do research. Otherwise, the promotional budget is wasted.”* TA10 thinks that *“I do not think that the promotions are done sufficiently. Tourists coming to our country experience the taste and culture of Türkiye, but this is not enough. We need to introduce our country to tourists who do not know Türkiye. The Ministry of Tourism needs to participate more in fairs held abroad.”*

Restaurant Selection in Culinary Tours

The fifth question is, according to which criteria did you choose the restaurants of your culinary tours? TA4 states that *“We prefer places that are easily accessible and we prefer the best restaurant in the region. The points that we pay attention to in our selection of restaurants are capacity, hygiene, quality of the products and local products. For us, restaurants should reflect the local cuisine of the destination. We choose the places that we have experienced and visited before. If there are restaurants that we do not know, we go and try. Then we put it on the tour program.”* TA3 emphasizes that *“We make sure that it is a popular restaurant in the region. It is also important for us that the restaurant has its own and different flavour. Restaurant location should be accessible to all people. Street food and luxury restaurants are among our choices.”* TA5 highlights that *“Specific dishes reflect the culture of the region. We address all people on our tour routes. We put street food and luxury restaurants at the same time in our tour plan.”* TA6 states that *“We prefer local food places. We try to choose places that appeal to every guest. We try to choose different segment locations, such as fine dining and street food. Restaurants become a place that appeals to everyone.”* TA1 emphasizes that *“We choose the restaurant according to the endpoint of the tour. The best local food place in that area is selected. We get advice from local guides in the area. We make sure that it is a place that can be visited comfortably.”* TA7 states that *“The menu is not very expensive in terms of price and restaurant has a variety of foods. Restaurants are selected by asking the local guides of the region. We choose the famous restaurants in that region.”* TA2 states that *“We get advice from local guides. It is important to ask someone who knows the area. We choose cheap and local restaurants. Local restaurants reflect the culture of the destination.”* TA8

indicates that *“We prefer good quality and famous restaurants. We cannot find a place in some restaurants. We prepare the tour programs six months before, and we reserve our places in the restaurants.”* TA9 and TA10 highlights that *“Restaurants should feature local food and reflect the culture of the region. The location of the restaurant must be in the center and accessible to all. I will definitely try the restaurant I took on the tour in advance. I don't take anyone to places I haven't tried. Home-cooked meals reflect the culture of the region better, and sometimes I have tourists serve home-cooked meals.”* So, accessibility and locality are essential criteria for the agencies. The local restaurant reflects more the culture of the destination. Travel agencies mostly ask local guides for restaurant selection. Most of the agencies try the restaurant on the tour in advance.

New Culinary Tour Routes

The sixth question is, what are your suggestions for new culinary tour routes in Türkiye? TA4 states that *“We prefer places that are easily accessible. We are researching and developing new regions in Eastern Anatolia, the Black Sea, Edirne, North Aegean and Thrace. We have a tour about cheese making in Boğatepe village on the Kars tour. We aim to introduce this cheese-making tour to other people.”* TA3 emphasizes that *“Kırıklareli, Bozcaada and Black Sea wine tour can be added. The Black Sea has a lot of food variety with many different herbs and flavours.”* TA6 highlights that *“We want to discover new places in Aegean region such as; Datça, Marmaris, Kula and Söğüt. We discovered “the day honey” in Birgi, and we introduced it to people. This honey is made with the first lights of the day. Only two people in that region make this honey.”* TA7 thinks that *“We want to reveal the unknown flavours in Elazığ, İzmir and Istanbul. Istanbul is a big city, but some places and restaurants are not recognised before.”* TA2 states that Turkish people prefer mostly Adana and Antep tours. *“There is no demand for other regions. These existing places are enough. For example, we did the Black Sea and Van tour, but not as a culinary tour. It is a cultural tour; we go to its famous restaurant. People do not come when we do a different culinary tour because they always see the same places as a culinary tour.”* TA5 emphasizes that *“It could be Konya, Erzurum, Eastern provinces and Van. Van pearl mullet and breakfast is famous, and it should be included in the culinary tour program.”* TA1 states that *“We want to add Van, Erzurum, Erzincan, Sivas regions to the tour program. The local foods of Ahlat (Bingöl) are impressive. We want people to experience the culture around here.”* TA8 states that *“New tour routes should be made to the Southeastern Anatolia and the Black Sea region. In the Black Sea region, Rize and Çamlıhemşin are very popular places. Other parts of the Black Sea should be discovered. Giresun, Konya, İzmir and Ordu can be added as tour routes. New places can be discovered in Fener and Balat in Istanbul. Akyaka has just begun to discover.”* TA9 states that *“There are many things that have not been discovered in the currently popular Antep, Mardin and Hatay tours. Turkish cuisine culture is very diverse here. Culinary tour routes can be added according to the demands of the people.”* TA10 indicates that *“Hatay and Gaziantep region should be more prominent. Gaziantep and Hatay are the most prosperous regions in terms of food culture.”* TA5 and TA1 opinion is near

the same, so they prepare new culinary tours to the Eastern part of Türkiye. TA3 and TA2 suggest the Black Sea tour as a culinary tour. Only TA1 emphasizes Ahlat (Bingöl) as a new culinary route. So, most of the agencies suggest different places for new culinary routes. Every agency studies different culinary regions, and it is important for Türkiye variety of culinary tourism.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Culinary Tourism

The seventh question is, what are your thoughts on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on culinary tourism? TA4 states that *“Tourism has been affected in general. We cannot talk about culinary tourism in a period when tourism is over.”* Hygiene and distance between tables is the most crucial factor in culinary tourism, so the small tours with few people mostly preferred. For instance, during the pandemic, nobody went to restaurants for a while. TA3 emphasizes that *“Restaurants have been closed for a while. We prefer a mostly big restaurant with a distance between tables. We cannot take tourists to local restaurants because they are small with no distance. We cannot arrange crowded tours to these local restaurants because their capacity is small.”* TA5 think that *“Now, people do not go abroad. We arrange tours with a few people. We follow the pandemic precautions. Small tours were preferred during this period. The culinary tour is a tour of pleasure. The cultural tour and culinary tour have decreased because people do not want to join the tour in this period.”* TA6 states that *“Nobody wants to eat in the restaurants and crowded places. Small tours are preferred with fewer people. We arrange family tours in the summer period. People do not go on tour, so they go on a culinary tour. Meals are cooked and eaten at home.”* TA1 states that *“Tours are not preferred. People run away from public transportation and crowded places. Nobody is eating outside because everyone is afraid of going outside. People plan their tours.”* TA7 indicates that *“No one prefers tours. Culinary tours were also affected. Restaurants were closed for a while. I took a tour of Fener and Balat recently, I invited a few friends free of charge, but they did not come. Currently, those coming from abroad prefer individual tours.”* TA2 states that *“Nobody wants to use public transportation and aircraft. They do not want to stay at the hotel. People do not want to go to places where people eat together.”* Culinary tourism is a tour of pleasure. People do not want to give money right now. TA8 indicates that *“We hesitate to go to the restaurant near us. People are afraid to go to a restaurant on tours. We assume that the pandemic will end in September and October. People are bored at home, and they will join the tours. Hygiene is paramount so that small tours will be preferred. People who know each other, which we call closed groups, are now travelling together.”* TA9 emphasizes that *“Those who come to culinary tours are generally over 60 years old. Therefore, the freedom of travel of these people was restricted during the pandemic period. No branch of tourism is currently working. Caterers buy products in bulk because they have to sell them at a more affordable price, but there is uncertainty right now. Many hotels closed because they could not pay their employees wages.”* TA10 emphasizes that *“Pandemic has affected tourism, thus, cultural and culinary tours related to tourism. Culinary tours are preferred by people with pleasure and interest. Pleasures and*

hobbies are unfortunately delayed at the moment.” So, travel agencies think that tourist in Türkiye prefers small tours in the pandemic period. In addition, people who know each other preferred this small tours. Culinary tourism is a pleasure tour, and now people do not want to spend money for their pleasure.

Changes and Innovations Brought by the Covid-19 Pandemic

Question number eight is what are the innovations and changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to culinary tourism. TA4 states that *“High level of hygiene is the most important precaution of COVID-19 pandemic.”* People prefer large restaurants. Large restaurants pay attention to the distance between tables. Tourist capacity in vehicles decreased. *“These measures affected the costs of tour organisations. Small tours are mostly preferred by people. Friends and family groups who know each other are now travelling together.”* TA3 highlights that *“Measures such as hygiene and distance sitting have been introduced. Hygiene is the most important point in the food and beverage industry. We have halved our vehicle capacity on tours. We will follow these measures for a long time. Small tours are in the foreground now.”* TA5 states that *“Advertisements were made about places to visit on social media channels. Bloggers promoted their own tour routes. People have seen that there is no need for travel agencies, and they travel with their own vehicles. Hygiene has become the most important element.”* TA6 states that small tours with few people are very popular in the pandemic. *“The open buffets in hotels were closed. During the pandemic period, we saw that the open buffet was not hygienic. An open buffet is a system that everyone was holding the same service equipment and putting food on their plate, which was not hygienic.”* TA1 emphasizes that *“There was a tendency to small tours. The number of people participating in the tour has been reduced, which increased the costs of travel agencies”*. When the tours were expensive, people started to travel themselves. TA7 highlights that there is a tendency of joining small tours. *“In the next few years, people will prefer small groups and boutique hotels. These measures will continue for 4-5 years; then it will turn back.”* TA2 states that *“Tours are not preferred by most people, so the number of people in vehicles decreased, which affected travel agencies' costs. It is necessary to keep up with this situation and take precautions against the COVID-19 pandemic.”* Ministry of Culture and Tourism publish Türkiye’s COVID- 19 Safe Tourism Certification Program (TGA, 2019). Appendix A and Appendix B shows the certification program criteria list. TA8 states that *“Safety, hygiene and isolation will gain great importance in all travels. With the pandemic, nature holidays, health holidays, camping holidays and caravan holidays will become attractive. For instance, boat tours and caravans were preferred this summer, whereas hotels were mainly preferred for spa and beauty. There have been many rentals from Airbnb. Domestic trips have become preferred due to the closed borders of other countries. This popularity will continue in the upcoming period. Small city and town trips are preferred instead of crowded big cities. In the first phase, instead of long-distance travels, short-flight destinations and routes that can be reached by car will be at the forefront.”* TA9 states that *“People saw the importance of cleanliness. It was essential to eat in the place where the meal was made in the restaurant, but with the*

pandemic, the meals were requested at home. Food businesses created more practical recipes that do not lose the character of the food. The courier system gained importance, and meal prices increased. With the increase in internet sales, local delicacies were delivered to houses.” TA10 states that *“The importance given to hygiene has increased. As a change, tours started to be organized for smaller groups. Small hotels are preferred. Caravan tourism and bungalow house rentals have increased during the pandemic period. Nature walks and camps are frequent. There has been a tendency towards domestic tourism.”* TA6 states that open buffets in all hotels are not preferred in the pandemic period. Hygiene is the most affected factor against an open buffet, as every guest holds the same equipment to take the food. As a result, the open buffet system has changed to a la carte in many hotels, which is a significant change in the service sector.

Suggestions for the Post-Pandemic Strategies of Türkiye’s Culinary Tourism

Question number nine is which strategies Türkiye should follow in the culinary tourism sector after the COVID-19 pandemic? TA4 states that tourism is the first sector to be affected. It seems that the effect will last for a long time. The strategic plan of the state is crucial. The capacity of tour vehicles has decreased, and the tour fees increase. *“Türkiye must announce to the world that we leave a healthy way to this pandemic. Tourists should trust us to choose us for travel. Our state should build this trust.”* TA3 states that an important share of Türkiye's revenues comes from tourism. *“Tourists should trust us to choose us for travel. We pay attention to social distance and hygiene in our tours. It is imperative to supply confidence to all over the world. Audits should be made more frequently, and it is necessary to prove this control with documents. If foreign tourists see these measures, they prefer us.”* TA5 emphasizes that *“Hygiene will continue for a while, and then it will be forgotten as time passes. The financial situation of the tourism sector and restaurants is terrible. When pandemic is over, people will go out and tours will increase. People will go to see the places they cannot visit.”* TA6 indicates that *“The income of the hotels is not at the desired level in Türkiye. The overnight fee at the hotels should be increased. The measures taken during the pandemic should be permanent. The number of patients and the measures taken against the corona should be announced to the whole world.”* TA1 emphasizes that *“The state should primarily provide financial support to travel agencies. It is an uncertain period now, and no one knows how long we will continue like this. A significant amount of revenue comes from tourism in Türkiye. After the pandemic, the demand for tours will increase, and we will return to our old days.”* TA7 states that *“The financial situation of the travel agencies is bad. The government gave loans to travel agencies, but their conditions are burdensome. Like travel agencies, the state earns 35 billion dollars annually with the help of travel agencies. Travel agencies are in bad shape right now. We want some of these 35 billion dollars to be donated to us. With this money, salaries will be paid, and travel agencies will not be closed. Most travel agencies have closed. We need financial support.”* TA2 highlights that *“We are in an uncertain period. Everyone should turn this pandemic into an opportunity. Everyone should focus on how to do what they can do better. Of course, this*

pandemic will end, and tourism companies will return to their old days. Türkiye must announce to the world that we leave a healthy way to this pandemic. We have to prove it with concrete patient numbers. Tourists do not come to Türkiye because the announced patient numbers are wrong. We must give reliable numbers to the world.” TA8 highlights that *“Short work allowance should be increased. Türsab should develop a more serious credit system. The debiting of tour agents should be delayed. The reduction of taxes has provided advantages to agencies.”* TA9 thinks that *“The Tourism sector in Türkiye is an important source of income. During the pandemic, tourism was severely affected. The assistance provided to tourism professionals is insufficient. However, the patient figures announced by Türkiye against the world are not reflected correctly. Providing accurate and reliable information will positively affect tourism in Türkiye.”* TA10 states that *“Turkish food culture should be promoted abroad. Fairs are the most significant places for promotions. The Ministry of Tourism needs to participate more in fairs held abroad.”* To sum up with, tourism is a significant income source for Türkiye. The state should help travel agencies economically. TA7 mentioned that travel agencies bring 35 billion dollars to the state. With this money, the state can help agencies to close their loans. Municipality and state attitude towards the world is critical during the pandemic. Reliability is the most important point in this period.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The food reflects the culture of a country, as it brings the family and society together. Under this scope, it is possible to claim that Türkiye has excellent product variety, and, each region in Türkiye has its unique dishes, spices and herbs. Therefore, every region can be promoted as culinary destinations.

Food is the most powerful cultural tool and it expresses the traditions, values and local lifestyle of destinations. Local culinary culture affects the motivation of tourists. All travel agencies in this research defines that culinary tours are organized for tasting new flavours at the destination. Türkiye has immense potential for culinary tourism. Every region has its product diversity, as the cooking of food, variety of spices and vegetables differs in every region. TA3 emphasizes that *“Tourists' perception has changed, and they want to go to a destination twice only to taste the dishes and it emphasizes that Ministry of Culture and Tourism give importance to sea-sand-sun tourism instead of culinary tourism.”* In order to draw more attention to the culinary tourism, municipalities must support culinary festivals and events. Their support plays a crucial role in the development of culinary tourism.

Research revealed that Gaziantep, Adana, Urfa, Mardin and Hatay are the most popular culinary tour routes for tourists. These provinces are more preferred in culinary tours with their culinary richness, geography and history. Additionally, Hatay and Gaziantep have proved their culinary richness by being included in the UNESCO Creative Gastronomy City list. Social media and culinary festivals have a vital role in making these routes popular.

The seasons have an important role in the popularity of culinary routes. For instance, in summer, Çeşme, Bodrum, Seferihisar and Urla become the most popular

destinations, while in the spring, Mardin, Urfa, Hatay, Gaziantep, Van, and Kars become the preferred destinations. In Anatolian cities, citizens do not have a habit of eating at the restaurant, which makes it very difficult for travel agencies. Municipality's main target is to support culinary tourism by opening dining halls for tourists to taste the local dishes. In such halls, local people cook unique dishes of the region, and serve them to the tourists. Thus, culinary tourism potential of the region might develop. The accessibility of the restaurant is very important for travel agencies during the tour program. Besides, the restaurants selected in culinary tours are important in terms of reflecting the cuisine and culture of the region. Eastern Anatolia, Black Sea, Edirne, Thrace, North Aegean and Eastern provinces has a potential for culinary tourism and these regions need to be more prominent. Municipalities and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism should prepare culinary tourism policies to promote unknown culinary routes in Türkiye. Moreover, organizing culinary festivals and social media promotions in those regions will increase the regions' tourism potential.

In conclusion, culinary tourism has an important potential in Türkiye, but this potential cannot be reflected on the performance well enough. Culinary tourism should be developed by the help of Ministry of Tourism and the local municipalities. In addition to this, more events and conferences are needed to be organised. Such events and conferences are important to make people familiar with the richness of Turkish cuisine and culture. Furthermore, it is important for Türkiye to attend international events and festivals for the presentation of Turkish cuisine to the world.

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