

Sustainable Food in the Travel Context

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Project Summary

The main goal of the project was to develop a deeper understanding on what is actually comprehended by the concept of sustainable food, and what holidaymakers really think about sustainable food consumption while travelling. Furthermore, the researchers also wanted to explore how tourism businesses are working on the implementation of sustainable food policies.

In order to reach a balanced approach, the research team carried out a review of the existing literature, a quantitative consumer survey with more than 8,000 respondents, and field visits in Gran Canaria and Antalya, Turkey. During the field visits, 23 interviews with hotel and cruise ship representatives and systematic, checklist-based assessments of sustainability aspects in food operations in 10 hotels and one cruise ship were conducted.

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Results of the project were summarized in a project report and in a how-to manual for tourism practitioners. Key findings include:

- **Sustainable food is a multidimensional concept:** An analysis of existing academic and practical literature revealed that the concept of sustainable food constitutes multiple dimensions that can be grouped into five sectors: economy, ecology, society, health, and culture.

Fig. 1: 5 pillar structure of sustainable food



- **Implementation through hotels and cruise ships on a low level:** While interview partners were generally interested in the concept of sustainable food, the overall level of implementation into business strategies and operations is low.

According to the representatives, major obstacles on the way to a higher implementation are lack of supplier infrastructure, cost considerations, lack of consciousness about the topic on the part of management, staff, and guests, and lack of external pressure.

- **Sustainable food generally important for package holiday travellers:** Up to 40% of all clients care a lot about sustainable food while travelling. Interestingly, local ingredients and regional food play a dominant role when it comes to customer attitudes, while other dimensions like organic or fair trade food are not that important (although still considerable). In addition, the survey has shown that certain package holiday travellers are also willing to pay more for a more sustainable (especially regional) diet, if tourist businesses provide information about the menu and create a pleasant eating atmosphere.

The study concludes that hotels should work on several key areas to improve their sustainability performance:

Awareness Raising and Knowledge Transfer

One key step on the way to sustainable food strategies is to raise awareness for the topic among staff and management. This can be achieved with specialized training sessions or “train the trainer” programmes for members of the management. Further measures could be the introduction of manuals and tools for the operational staff.

Guest Communication

Informing guests about food sustainability can be a useful way to change their behaviour. Communication thereby can take place through media channels (print, film) or directly at the places where food is served (e.g. through signs that inform about the foodstuff or through members of staff).

Setup of Local Producer/Supplier Networks

The interviewed experts stated several obstacles for an increased offer of local products in the hotel such as quantity/quality risk and high prices of local food. These can be overcome by local food networks that share produce, infrastructure, and other resources to offset their economic disadvantages.

More information and the handbook for practitioners can be found and downloaded on the project website <https://www.modul.ac.at/about/departments/tourism-and-service-management/projects/>.