

COOKING COURSES AND TOURISM: ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION, ESCAPISM, OR ESTHETICS?

SUAT AKYÜREK

Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services, Gümüşhane University, Gümüşhane, Turkey

In this study, the experience dimensions developed by Pine and Gilmore were evaluated in the case of the cooking courses in which the tourists attended during their holidays. The data collection consists of comments from the tourists from different nationalities who visited Turkey and who shared their experiences connected to the participation in cooking courses in Istanbul. In total, 400 comments on five cooking courses in 2018–2019 were analyzed. The findings demonstrate that the tourists had an intense education and entertainment experience through the cooking courses. Moreover, although not as intense as the education and entertainment experience, some tourists were found to share their esthetics and escapism experiences. Consequently, Pine and Gilmore's experience dimensions have been validated for cooking courses. The study concludes that memorable experiences emerge and result in positive behavioral intentions.

Key words: Cooking learning tourism; Cooking courses; Tourism experiences; Experience economy

Introduction

Depending on the changing market conditions, the requests and expectations of tourists have differentiated as well. While participating in tourism activities, tourists not only buy goods and services but also gain experience. In this context, the tourism industry not only offers functional aspects of goods and services, but also tries to enrich them with their experiential aspects. Therefore, businesses have set out to create competitiveness by producing experience-oriented products (Walls et

al., 2011). The satisfaction of tourists will increase when the experiences designed in line with the needs of tourists are offered as touristic products. Especially in recent years, destinations need to develop a new range of skills that go beyond traditional tourism services, and go into the field of experience development, creativity, and innovation (Richards, 2012). In this context, gastronomic values can increase the experience of tourists and can be the most memorable part of the trip. Thus, the gastronomic values of a destination can represent the image and distinctive feature of the destination

(Karim & Chi, 2010). However, the search for authentic flavors and experiences by tourists has been a major driving force, and tourism destinations practically seek to develop their distinctive and unique identities through gastronomic values (Zainal et al., 2010).

Gastronomic tourism is considered one of the most dynamic and fastest growing segments of the tourism market (Stanley & Stanley, 2015; Walter, 2016), which has a significant potential as a tool for developing and marketing the tourism regions (Okumus et al., 2007). Therefore, many destinations apply gastronomy as a central tool in their promotion, and mobilize their food and beverage products and experiences as a center of attraction (Robinson & Getz, 2013). Gastronomy is seen as an indispensable authentic element of regional culture and sustainability. Moreover, it is also considered as a way of separating, describing, redefining, and negotiating material and cultural boundaries (Mkono, 2011). In addition to contributing to the general travel experiences or memorable experiences of tourists, the gastronomic resources of destinations can have positive effects on their travel satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017).

Karim and Chi (2010) pointed out that due to the increasing interest in gastronomic tourism in recent years, this type of tourism has become one of the most promising tourism types. Henderson (2009) stated that gastronomic tourism is now a common type of tourism, and that it is also accessible to tourists and customizable for groups or individuals. In addition, as the gastronomic tourism is possible to be realized throughout the year, it has a particular significance for increasing employment and income (Richards, 2012). Food events support other tourism types and increase the value of destinations (Tellström et al., 2006). In this context, different types of products and services are offered to tourists in an attempt to develop gastronomy tourism. For the last 20 years, cooking courses have become a most important gastronomic activity that tourists participate during their travels.

Considering the issues mentioned above, the main purpose of the study is to evaluate the experience dimensions developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998) as part of the cooking courses offered to tourists in destinations.

Tourism Experience

Since the 1970s, inquiries into the tourism experience have become one of the most popular academic topics (Chen, 2013). The study of the tourism experience forms its roots in Cohen's (1979) work and establishes its foundations through the work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Otto and Ritchie (1996), and Pine and Gilmore (1998). Studies have dealt with the psychological, philosophical, sociological, and anthropological aspects of tourism experiences, and many of them focused on a particular geography or type of tourism (Ek et al., 2008). Many researchers (Cohen, 1979; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) suggested that experience is the essence of the tourism industry, and that tourism should be considered as an experiential product. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), it has become almost impossible to find a sector that has not undergone a development towards experiences, particularly the tourism sector being in the first place to enrich the product with portfolios of experiences.

Tourists seek and pay for experience above all (Barnes et al., 2016), and that motivates business and destinations to elaborate and refine their offer in this respect. Experience is simply the mental state that occurs in any given individual, at any conscious moment (Poullsson & Kale, 2004, p. 270). The tourism experience is individual phenomena marked by psychological factors and processes as well as by social phenomena that emerge in the context of individuals' interactions with themselves, and with their environment (Kastenholz & Lima, 2011). The tourism experience has a multidimensional and holistic structure that includes the complexity of people, places, organizations, actions, technologies, and objects (Osman et al., 2014). In his literature review to conceptualize the tourism experience, Ryan (2010) stated that attempts to provide precise explanations of the tourism experience represent many challenges and opportunities, not the least when food and beverages are involved.

Food symbolizes a strong attention-grabbing, strong quality of life and authenticity (Mason & Paggiaro, 2009). Tourists are value oriented and the destination itself is a value provider for tourists. The nature and diversity of tourism experiences offered by a destination determines the value of

the destination (Lin & Kuo, 2016). Tourism experiences are often based on a series of encounters between tourists and tourism employees, and in the food provision the meeting with the locals become particularly essential. While traveling, tourists connect or participate in certain events and pile up memories as a function of organizing tourist trips (Larsen, 2007).

Gastronomy is one of the most important attractions sought out by tourists in their desire for new and memorable experiences (Selwood, 2003). According to Richards (2012), gastronomic elements form the basis of the tourism experience. However, food is a gateway to local culture and can bring tourists and locals together in a common cultural experience. From a visitor's perspective, food can contribute to unique experiences (Mei et al., 2017). When tourists travel on a local, national, and international basis, they consciously seek authentic culinary experiences (Henderson, 2009; Stanley & Stanley, 2015), as food can provide opportunities to experience and understand local culture (Laksiri, 2019). Likewise, while food creates a socialization process for consumers, it enables intergenerational transfer, a sense of belonging, and formation of an intangible local capital for producers (Richards, 2015, p. 10).

Gastronomy has the opportunity to provide an authentic, memorable food- or beverage-related activity that involves behind-the-scenes observations accompanied by cultural or regional illuminations and often results in participation in festival, daily, or formal food and beverage (Williams et al., 2014). Gastronomic experience is not only related to eating, but also in relation with social, emotional, imaginary, and technical features (Martínez & Albeniz, 2018, p. 113). Gastronomic experience can be derived from many activities such as regional cuisines, gastronomic events, establishments offering different food and beverages, and gastronomic routes and tours (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Getz and Robinson (2014) stated that the basic experiences of tourists traveling for gastronomy purposes are the consumption of authentic cuisine, learning about food/drink and gastronomic traditions, and socializing. However, Andersson et al. (2016) stated that the most popular experience sought by tourists is "enjoying local cuisine at a local restaurant" (p. 55). In addition, the authors suggested

that the most experienced gastrotourists prefer to participate in cooking festivals and meeting/learning events with chefs. Stone et al. (2019) stated that gastronomy tourism activities include experiences related to local and unique restaurants and bars, food trucks and stands, breweries, wineries, tasting rooms, culinary schools, and culinary events.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) emphasized that creating a memorable and personalized experience can provide economic benefits and change a company's position among its competitors. In this context, Pine and Gilmore (1999) divided the dimensions on two axes of experience into four groups: entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism. Experiences consist of active (strong) and passive (weak) participation according to physical participation of the individual. In active participation, the individual becomes a part of the experience and directly participates in the activity. In passive participation, the individual does not directly participate in activities (Carù & Cova, 2003). Watching a show about cooking can be an example of passive participation, while cooking with a cook is an example of active participation. However, absorption is expressed as occupying the attention of the individual by bringing an experience to the mind of the individual, while immersion can be expressed as being a physical part of the experience itself (Oh et al., 2007). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), customers stated that they learn in the educational experience, go and do in the escapism experience, feel in the entertainment experience, and just be there in the esthetics experience. If all these four dimensions of experience take place in a single environment, only then the simple space can become the original space where an experience can be staged. Experience dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

Entertainment experience is when people absorb themselves passively with their senses such as when they are watching theater, going to a concert, reading a book. Watching and listening to an Elvis Presley impersonator singing at a local festival or watching a clown ride a tall unicycle at an entertainment park are examples of the entertainment experience (Oh et al., 2007). The gastronomic entertainment experience may include watching a cook's show or a cooking contest on TV. However, when tourists watch a cooking show or a bartender cocktail show during their holidays, it can be considered

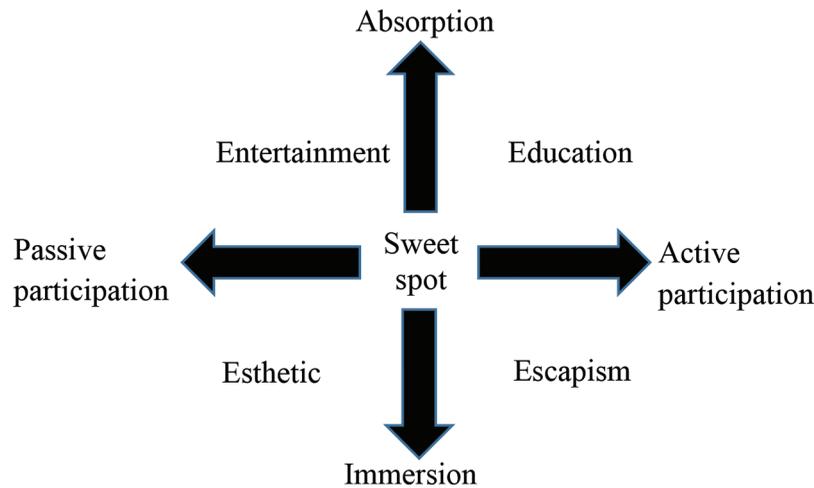


Figure 1. Dimensions of experience. Adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1999).

as an entertainment experience. Even a dinner that tourists have with their relatives or friends can turn into an enjoyable experience in itself (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004).

Education is the experiences in which people participate mentally and/or actively to increase their knowledge and skills. Participating in cooking courses as part of gastronomy, or visiting gastronomy museums are important activities in terms of educational experiences. However, tasting new food and beverages, participating in tasting events, learning new things about the culinary culture of the destinations, and learning new culinary techniques can be important educational experiences for tourists.

In esthetics experiences, people enter an event or setting and just want to be there. They usually have no effect in the event or setting. Tourism is an action involving the consumption of the place, and the visual, cultural, and historical features of the place can be important factors for tourists (Sims, 2010). In gastronomic perspective, spending time in a scenic restaurant or in an authentic café can be considered as part of esthetics experiences. Esthetics value comes from educating the mind that includes not only personal development but also an element of social change (Webster & Rennie, 2011). Esthetics experience means entering into an emotional environment (Thanh & Kirova, 2018), and the gastronomic products can offer esthetic

experiences for tourists. For example, eating in a scenic environment, visiting an authentic food market, or an elaborate plate presentation such as a painting canvas can offer esthetic experiences for tourists.

Escapism experiences are mostly intertwining activities by going to a place such as theme parks, casinos, computer games, or internet chat rooms (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In the gastronomic perspective, going to agricultural areas and participating in olive, tea, and hazelnut harvesting can be an example of escapism experiences. Such environments are different from the daily life of the tourists or the routine holiday atmosphere and can offer important escape opportunities. According to Thanh and Kirova (2018), escape experience refers to seeking different experiences from the daily experiences of tourists. Similarly, Kim et al. (2009) associated going out of the daily routine with the escapism experience.

Tourism managers can develop new and multifaceted experiences for making their touristic products memorable and positively affect the future behavioral intentions of tourists (Barnes et al., 2016; Widjaja et al., 2018). Creating positive, memorable, or rich experiences is important for the success of destinations in reaching tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and the intention of tourists to recommend the destination (Cetin & Okumuş, 2018). Experiences are the most important source of personal information

that influences tourists' decision-making whether to revisit a destination (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016). In addition, people's positive experiences on vacation can be a model for how the next behavior should be. Tourists who are satisfied with the food served in a destination will give positive word of mouth and may visit the destination again (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Ji et al., 2016). The total tour service experience determines whether the tourists feel satisfied or dissatisfied at the end of their visit. This is a sign as to whether or not they will use the travel agency again (Xu & Chan, 2010). Adongo et al. (2015) also argued that local dining experiences can influence the intention of tourists to recommend those to others.

Cooking Courses

In the competitive tourism market, it is beneficial to create new ways in which a destination can be marketed, and cooking courses play an important role in this regard (Luoh et al., 2020). According to Richards (2012), tourists' desire to participate in food production and preparation in their travels is on the rise. Cooking courses can introduce the culture of the destination for tourists and offer a rich learning experience. The cooking activities for tourists who attend cooking courses can take purposes such as hobbying, learning, getting entertained, enhancing skills, having a good time, and pursuing a special interest (Sharples, 2003). Offering cooking courses would contribute to the diversification, originality, and competitiveness of tourism products in the region (Litavniece et al., 2019). By means of cooking courses, tourists can find the opportunity to embrace the local food culture of the destination for a longer time (Azavedo, 2019; Chang et al., 2020; Luoh et al., 2020).

Learning and engagement are the key elements of successful experiences (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). Cooking courses where tourists can learn about food or drink and enjoy it as a final product and gain experience to cook them—participating actively (cooking) or passively (observing)—are in high demand (Litavniece et al., 2019). The people who attend cooking courses may be food or cooking enthusiasts. However, they may also be just “normal” people who want to enjoy the local food culture or have a passion for learning (Hjalager, 2020). Despite

personal differences, foodie tourists value meeting and getting to know different people through shared dining experiences (Williams et al., 2018).

Bell (2014), in her study on cooking courses in Bali, evaluated the impacts of cooking courses where local small-scale entrepreneurs do their best to generate some income from tourists visiting the region. Also Jolliffe (2019) argued that in the context of gastronomic tourism, tourists visiting Japan and Thailand see cooking courses as a means of emphasizing their connections and interactions with local people. Azavedo (2019) pointed out that the main reasons for tourists to participate in cooking courses in Thailand are primarily cultural education rather than gaining cooking skills. However, it has been found that socialization is also quite important.

Litavniece et al. (2019) examined cooking courses as a new product of gastronomy tourism in their study in Latvia. Jolliffe (2019, p. 64) pointed out that cooking courses offer intense experiences by combining experiential tourism and the trend of cocreation. The authors stated that especially tourists find the opportunity to learn about local cuisines through local people. Chang et al. (2020) revealed the concrete elements of cooking holidays, and proposed a hierarchical framework for the future promotion of cooking holidays in Taiwan. Local food, food trails, cooking experiences, and pleasant environments and atmospheres are key characteristics. In the study conducted by Luoh et al. (2020), market tour experiences, positive interpersonal interactions, exotic food experiences, unique cooking learning experiences, and a fun learning atmosphere were identified as key entertainment factors in cooking courses. According to the authors, attending overseas cooking courses is also a type of learning tourism that expands an individual's personal expanded cross-cultural understanding.

Cooking courses are usually carried out in three stages. First of all, they start with buying materials from historical or known shops or markets for the preparation of foods. Following that, the food is prepared and cooked together with the trainers, and finally the course finishes with the consumption of the food. According to research conducted in Thailand by Walter (2016), tourists not only eat at cooking courses but also aim to learn and buy ingredients in open-air markets, become skilled in preparation and cooking techniques, and understand many

cultural beliefs behind Thai food routes. According to the author, cooking courses, unlike other types of tourism, engage all five senses and involve the active participation of the body, soul, and mind.

Cooking Courses in Turkey

Cooking courses have a variety of topics and approaches—for example, making pasta in Italy, making sushi in Japan, cooking with a well-known chef, or cooking at the farm might be the leading activities sought out by tourists. Similarly, also in cooking courses in Turkey, together with the tourists, the famous Turkish dishes (carniyarık, kebab, islim kebab, Turkish ravioli, etc.), desserts (baklava, tulumba dessert, rice pudding, etc.), and drinks (tea, coffee, sherbet, etc.) can be made. Also in Turkey cooking courses are performed for tourists, particularly in Istanbul and in major tourist centers such as Cappadocia, Antalya, and Bodrum. Some of the cooking courses are given in resident's own houses, and some are offered by professional agencies or specialized cooking course companies.

The places for cooking courses may be well-equipped kitchens that are designed for the purpose, but may also be “primitive,” taking place in outdoor settings such as over bonfires or on fishing boats (Hjalager, 2020). Cooking courses in Turkey are mainly organized in professional kitchens, established for this particular purpose. The cooking courses that are commented on in the TripAdvisor website usually consist of businesses showing a professional performance in this job. Table 1 shows the businesses that organize cooking courses for tourists in Turkey.

Cooking courses for tourists are organized in different regions of Turkey. In particular, Istanbul offers rich opportunities to tourists in terms of cooking courses. The cooking courses in Turkey have their own websites where they explain their services comprehensively with visuals. Businesses that organize cooking courses offer a variety of gastronomic products in different themes such as gastronomy tours, cooking courses, market tours, vegan tours, harvest tours, wine tours. The services can be provided to groups in a private or joint way. Cooking courses usually take place in three stages: the shopping stage, the cooking stage, and the eating/serving stage together. Cooking courses can last from 3 to 8

hr. In the courses, food and drinks known in Turkish cuisine are usually prepared as a menu. In addition, food and beverage types can be determined depending on the wishes of the tourists. Especially, foods such as baklava, kebab, and mezes, which are icons of Turkish cuisine, are the most common gastronomic products prepared in the courses.

Gastronomy tourism experiences can be combined with new incomes for food producers and entrepreneurs. Therefore, many cooking courses have add-ons (e.g., the sales of cookbooks, gastronomic tools, and table accessories). Links with the local gastronomy sector are increased by the sales of products to take away, such as wines, preserves, oils, and chutneys (Hjalager, 2020). Cooking courses in Turkey are increasing their income with various souvenirs (food and beverages, kitchen utensils, spices, photographs, etc.). Thus, tourists are enabled to remember their experiences after their travels.

There are many professional companies that provide services for the cooking courses in Turkey, and their numbers are on the increase. It can be observed from online reviews that businesses in different regions serve tourists from many nationalities. Besides, the rich culinary and gastronomic environment (food and beverage businesses, food markets, herbalists, street food, and so on) within Turkey offers significant opportunities with cooking courses. As a result, Turkey opens new doors within the framework of cooking courses. Therefore, Turkey is a convenient destination for research.

Methodology

In this study netnography was used to examine the experiences of tourists who attended the cooking courses. The term netnography was suggested by Kozinets (2002) with the aim of evoking traditional qualitative research ethnography. According to Kozinets, netnography (ethnography on the internet) is the ethnography utilizing the contribution to online communities as a data source. Such contributions provide information about the symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups not available in the same amount and quality from other sources.

In this context, netnography can offer the potential to provide rich and in-depth information. We

Table 1
Some Cooking Courses in Turkey

Name of School/Course	Location	Focus	Options Offered in the Course	Web Address
Cooking Alaturka	Istanbul	Food tours, cooking courses, restaurant	The most known soup, main dish, dessert and mezes belonging to Turkish cuisine (lentil soup, borek, Turkish dip, etc.)	https://cookingalaturka.com/
Istanbul Cooking School	Istanbul	Cooking courses	The most known soups, main dishes, pilafs, vegetables in olive oil, mezes and desserts belonging to Turkish cuisine	http://www.istanbulcooking-school.com/
Cookistan Istanbul Cooking Classes	Istanbul	Cooking courses	Six different typical traditional meals/courses (dolma, pumpkin dessert, lentil patties, artichoke, etc.)	https://cookistan.com/
Turkish Flavours	Istanbul, Nevşehir (Cappadocia)	Cooking courses, food tours, vegetarian tours	Six Istanbul & Turkish Cuisine recipes (kısır, cacik, Turkish pilaf, kamıyarık, revani, etc.)	https://www.turkishflavours.com/
Afiyet Olsun Istanbul	Istanbul	Cooking courses, food tours	Ottoman cuisine, Turkish baklava making workshop, Turkish vegetarian cooking workshop, Turkish pastry making workshop, traditional Turkish breakfast class	https://afiyetolsunistanbul.com/
Cooking Classes Bodrum	Muğla (Bodrum)	Cooking courses, olive harvesting, food & wine events	Making baklava, mezes, kebabs and Turkish vegetarian cooking workshop	https://www.cookingclasses-bodrum.com/
Cappadocia Home Cooking	Nevşehir (Cappadocia)	Cooking courses, restaurant	Local foods, local desserts and different kinds of pastry	http://cappadociahomecooking.com/
Ananas Cooking School	Antalya	Cooking courses	Turkish local foods and world icon dishes (pizza, noodle, risotto, etc.)	https://ananas-cooking-school-business.site/
Garden Kitchen Cooking Classes	Aydın (Kuşadası)	Cooking courses	Preparing food and drinks specific to the region	https://www.inspirock.com/turkey/kusadasi/garden-kitchen-cooking-courses-a8210858847
Urla Cooking Class	Izmir (Urla)	Cooking courses, harvest tours	Olive oil tasting course, gluten – free cake workshop, courses according to special demand	http://www.urlacookingclass.com/

want to identify and understand the needs and decision effects of relevant online consumer groups. Compared to traditional and market-oriented ethnography, netnography may be less time consuming and complex. Morgan (2006) argued that the online travel reviews shared by tourists allow them to freely express their attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Netnography offers important opportunities for researchers to deeply understand consumption messages, concerns, and experiences. According to Mkonon (2011), netnography offers a new approach that can reveal the subjective realities of tourists more candidly than traditional qualitative methods.

TripAdvisor, the world's largest travel platform, operates in 49 markets and 28 languages. TripAdvisor reached an average of 463 million monthly visitors in 2019, and has approximately 859 million reviews and views on accommodation, restaurants, experiences, airlines, cruise lines, etc. (<https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/tr-about-us>). For this reason, the TripAdvisor website was chosen as the area to reach the research data, and the comments on different cooking courses were examined. In this context, 400 comments about five cooking courses located in the city of Istanbul, Turkey were examined. The reviewed comments were limited to the date range of January 2018 and December 2019. Tourists who attended cooking courses from different nationalities made comments in many languages, mainly in English but also in German, French, Chinese, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. A total of 1,370 comments were made in five courses in Istanbul (see Table 1) and 1,222 of these comments were in English. Only English comments were examined in the study. No changes were made to wording of the comments in order to avoid any confusion.

There are two basic approaches for the analysis of descriptive data (presenting the data to the reader with a descriptive approach with direct quotations, revealing patterns) obtained in the qualitative research and in the content analysis (coding and the construction of thematic groupings). Content analysis refers to a closer examination of the data obtained and to reaching the concepts and themes that explain such data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In the study, the experience areas developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) were examined with a deductive approach in the light of online comments

made by tourists who attended cooking courses. The present 400 comments were subjected to content analysis according to four predetermined areas of experience, and the patterns (descriptions) were removed by repeated reading. Thus, it was investigated whether it is possible to test and verify the areas of experience that Pine and Gilmore (1999) revealed within the scope of cooking courses.

Findings

Based on the four basic experience dimensions by Pine and Gilmore (1998), the comments about five cooking courses operating in Istanbul are examined below. They are organized according to the four fields. In addition, findings regarding behavioral intention are provided.

Cooking Courses as Education Experience

When the comments shared on the TripAdvisor website were examined, it was determined that the tourists who attended the cooking courses were offered an intense education experience. Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) pointed out that education experience is an important factor in travel motivation of tourists, and that education experience plays an important role in enhancing tourists' positive memories and satisfaction. The tourists who attended cooking courses shared information about learning new recipes, learning new preparation and cooking techniques, learning new spices and ingredients, learning new service and presentation techniques, learning the history of food and beverages, and learning tips about cooking. In addition, they stated that they had the opportunity to get to know different culinary cultures and learn about the restaurants in the region thanks to the cooking courses. Below are direct quotes from the experiences shared by tourists who attended cooking courses.

It is hardly surprising that learning is a main issue in cooking courses. In the following, examples are provided regarding the more specific learning content. Some of the comments shared with the education/learning experiences include recipes:

A wonderful experience. . . . The recipes we prepared were varied as we learnt the origins of the dishes.

We learned to make five dishes: A soup, an appetizer, a vegetable dish, a meat main and a dessert. The recipes were all explained carefully and the ingredients were not very hard to get a hold of. We'll be taking the skills we learned with us.

I learned a lot about what gives Turkish food its distinctive flavor, plus a few extra tips about Turkish wine, how to cook beans, and read tea leaves.

I loved this cooking class—lots of fun and tips while we were very hands on learning to cook the 5 dishes. Our teachers were very informative and inclusive as well as having lots of local knowledge.

Other observations about learning experiences refer to cultural elements:

I took a cooking class a few days after arriving in Istanbul and found it a great introduction not only to Turkish food but Turkish culture.

It is a best place to have a closer look at the local culture.

Beautiful food and cultural experience. I attended a food walking tour and cooking class with my parents, and it was absolutely fantastic! The three of us were guided through small local markets, cafes and restaurants, trying very typical food whilst learning about both the neighborhoods and the origin of the food.

An experience not only to learn about Turkish customs and food but also an insight into local life and culture. Delicious and easy cooking—with a sociable dinner together afterwards with other students and local wine. Super friendly teachers who open the door into Turkish life and puts a human face to the claim of kind and relaxed Turkish people!

The history of the meal emerge as an interest for some of the tourists:

The history and other information relating to the meal was interesting and informative.

We loved our class. Amazing friendly teachers that got you involved in all of the steps of the cooking, while giving more information about local customs and Turkey in general - a wealth of information and helpful hints. The menu was fantastic - traditional yet dishes that are harder to

come across as a tourist. Great fun, interesting and delicious. Highly recommended!

We learned more in this trip than the entire 10 days of travel.

The courses participant also commented about learning new techniques:

I cook a lot and learned several new techniques. This was a very fun and informational experience.

My cooking skills are fairly limited, but I learned a good deal in a short period of time, and quite a bit more about Turkish food that I never knew (and I love Turkish food).

My husband and I celebrated our wedding anniversary with this cooking class. Our teachers were friendly, humourous, and patient with our limited cooking skills. We learned so much about Turkish cuisine and some culinary techniques. It was a relaxed night full of smiles and laughter. What a wonderful experience that I would highly recommend to anyone who wants to learn more about the delicious food of Turkey!

The following posts emphasize the ties with the normal tourism interest about food and beverage businesses in the region, and it suggest the wider impacts for other providers of tourism services:

We learnt a lot and had a really fun time. The team were super welcoming and took the time to take us through lots of tips for Istanbul and their restaurant recommendations were great!

I am very much a novice cook and learnt so much. The food was superb—packed with fantastic local produce—and we will certainly try to recreate some of the dishes at home in the UK. Everyone at Cooking Alaturka was so welcoming and kind, and Leyla gave us some brilliant tips for local spice buying, Turkish phrases and where to go for meals.

The owner event went above and beyond and wrote a list of restaurants and sites not to miss!

You can learn not only how to cook, but also how to categorise Turkish food finely, which saffron is authentic, which shop is better to buy souvenir, which restaurant is best to fulfill your enthusiastic stomach!!

Cooking Courses as an Entertainment Experience

Entertainment is one of the experiences that tourists seek in their trips. The tourists who attended cooking courses shared about the fun atmosphere of the classroom, the fun approach from the instructors, and the fun of shopping for cooking. However, cooking together is seen as an important entertainment experience for many of the tourists attending the cooking courses. Thus, the majority of tourists who attended the cooking courses stated that they had a lot of fun during the course:

It really was a lot of fun and we loved working in a kitchen that was filled with laughter. Once again we would like to thank the staff for a most enjoyable experience.

A truly fun and delicious cooking class! On our last night in Istanbul we attended the evening cooking class. Rocco and his chef were delightful and fun. . . . There were 6 in our class and everyone had a great time were all friendly. We prepared a wonderful meal that we ate in the restaurant which was lovely. Leyla, Rocco's wife, forwarded me a recipe for beyran soup that we so enjoyed on the "Two Continent One Soul" food tour she guided us on (reviewed separately here). Included with recipe was a link to Turkish recipes making it easy to begin preparing Turkish meals at home. Since arriving home I have found most of the hard to find ingredients. Spending our last night in Istanbul at Cooking Alaturka is a great memory.

We had so much fun with this cooking class.

The interpersonal relationships are crucial for the entertainment dimensions:

The other group who was there in our class was so funny and we had a great time having dinner with them afterwards.

The chefs are authentic, expert and wittfully funny facilitating a great collaboration and teamwork.

The class was fun and instructive, with just enough hands-on participation and explanation about ingredients and techniques. We had a great time and got to eat a delicious meal too.

Both the hosts and other guests were super fun and we had very pleasant conversation talking about food, wine, and travel tips. It was a very memorable experience!

Also the shopping was found to give raise the smiles:

This was an awesome class. Not only did I get an amazing cooking lesson, but lots of history and a local's view of the markets.

Cooking Courses as an Esthetic Experience

In cooking courses, the environment where food is cooked and served, the shops and markets visited for shopping, the tools and equipment used can provide an esthetic experience. There is a lot to stimulate the vision, hearing, taste, smell, and feeling senses. Chang et al. (2020) argued that the participants evaluate food as an esthetic experience through cooking courses.

In their online comments, the tourists who attended the cooking courses shared the esthetics particularly of cooking environment, the esthetics of the house where cooking course was given, the esthetics of service, the esthetics of tools and equipment used, and the esthetics of shopping places:

The atmosphere is warm, the food is incredible and the service friendly.

Ambiance of the dining area was wonderful. The kitchen was well appointed and spacious. Ingredient quality was very high.

Her home is warm, cozy, immaculately clean and beautiful decorated.

Great food, great people and great fun! The kitchen is set up well for everyone to have a turn. The recipes were great and the dinner with the class was lovely!

The food and cooking was authentic with good background & history.

The chef met us on the street, took us for a tour in the neighbour to introduce us to the local food restaurants and stores. Then she took us to her place where we did the course, the place is beautifully decorated, neat and clean. . . .

The spice market was so colourful and smelled so good. . . . We got to taste so many things.

The place is excellent and the class is amazing. You can learn for the real Turkish flavor just let

yourself go and enjoy the travel in the spicy bazaar and the class!!

The cooking class itself was brilliantly organised to give a fun and casual atmosphere whilst being clean and efficient, and the food was delicious.

Cooking Courses as an Escapism Experience

Traveling is often a way for people to escape their daily lives and experience something extraordinary (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Oh et al. (2007) stated that the escapism experience is probably one of the most frequently listed consumer motivations in tourism research. For some tourists, cooking courses can offer an escapism experience. In particular, it offers opportunities to socialize and have a good time for tourists who travel alone. Besides, cooking courses may offer some tourists the opportunity to relax, ease, rest, and escape from the stillness of the holiday for a moment.

Some of the comments regarding the escapism experience are provided directly below:

I am travelling in Istanbul on my own this time and was looking for some ways to spend my time because I have seen it all before. A friend suggested I do a cooking class because I love to cook.

What a fantastic way to unwind on a rainy day by learning to cook and enjoy the dishes after class.

Great people, great food, great place! We had the most incredible time here! We decided to do a cooking class on our last day in Istanbul, and luckily, they had space for us! When we arrived we were walked through the evening's menu including a brief discussion of the different types of ingredients we would be using. . . .

The class was fun and relaxing, less stressful than cooking at home! I think this is a great option for someone staying in Istanbul who wants to do something a little different and still enjoy a delicious meal out.

As a result, tourists who attend cooking courses can experience all four dimensions of experience simultaneously, but learning comes in as the most commented, which is not surprising. However, for tourists who have these four experiences, cooking courses can turn into a memorable experience in their

travels, also on the other dimensions. This underlines the importance for cooking course organizers to be aware of spicing up the courses with opportunities to relax, laugh, make relationships with others, and simply to enjoy the setting and atmosphere. To judge from the comments on TripAdvisor, the five cooking school do succeed with this.

Cooking Courses as the Best Experience During Travel

In addition, it is understood from the comments that the behavioral intentions of tourists who had intense experiences are also positive. In this context, cooking courses can also provide tourists with memorable experiences. In particular, some of the tourists who attend the cooking courses in Turkey stated that their best memorable experiences during their travels were the cooking courses:

My fiance and I decided to do this on a whim, and so thankful we did because it turned out to be one of our top favorite activities during our trip! It was a very intimate setting with a small group, and a super relaxing and fun end to a day of sight-seeing. We absolutely loved our hosts and the recipes, it was a lot of food and everything was extremely delicious!

My girlfriend got me this cooking class for my birthday, and it was brilliant. I am a travel writer, working for The Sunday Times in the UK, and I can say that this is one of the best experiences I've had travelling. . . . Their brilliant team of local cooks/chefs, created a fun, informative and informal experience.

We had the best experience and would highly recommend this to everyone visiting Istanbul. . . . This was by far the highlight of our trip. We loved the entire experience.

It turned out to be the highlight of my Turkish Vacation!

Cooking Courses and Behavioral Intentions

Tourists who are satisfied with the food experiences on a destination deliver positive word of mouth to friends and family, and they may also choose to revisit the destination (Ji et al., 2016). Most of the tourists who attended cooking courses

gave information about their behavioral intentions in their comments. Accordingly, tourists who had positive experiences stated that they would like to attend such courses again in the upcoming years. They suggested their relatives and other tourists participate too.

Below are the shares of tourists who attended cooking courses about their forward-looking behavioral intentions:

I would highly recommend this class for anyone who wants to have a real Turkey experience.

A full day of delights and very highly recommended if you love food and want to better understand food traditions of everyday people in Turkey.

Highly recommend this for people interested in cooking & meeting lovely people & eating delicious food.

From the recipes given to us before we left, I have made some of the dishes back here in the UK. They bring back very fond memories of a fantastic day with amazing people. I would recommend this tour and class to everyone.

The recipes are simple yet delicious. Hands on and interactive this is was an amazing way to end our trip. If you enjoy cooking this is definitely something you must do!

Overall, this is a cannot-miss experience if you are visiting Istanbul!

Positive food experiences in a trip often result in positive aggregate memories of a trip. Such feeling of attachment to a place can stimulate the travelers to buy similar food at home (Stone et al., 2019). Urry (2009) stated that the tourism experience is a contrast between “ordinary” and “unusual,” “home” and “remote.” In the study conducted by Bezzola and Lugosi (2018), it was determined that tourists feel at home thanks to the food and beverage experiences they gained at their travel destinations.

Accordingly, the tourists who attended cooking courses were determined that they would apply what they have learned in their daily lives. The ordinariness of daily life can be changed by having continuous gastronomic experiences in daily life. However, as a result of having such continuous

experiences in daily life, positive feelings can develop towards the destination, the experiences in that destination may increase and become more permanent, and desire for visiting the destination again may arise in the future:

Good team, good vibes, good dinner! I attended at a cooking course and it was fun, learning some history, some kitchen practices and of course making Turkish dish. And I loved the menu, I cant wait to try it at home.

The food was superb—packed with fantastic local produce—and we will certainly try to recreate some of the dishes at home in the UK.

I can't wait to repeat the recipes when we get back home. It was great fun!

Once back in her home, which is so cool I might add, we go to know one another through conversation, cooking, and eating.

A fantastic experience and I truly cannot wait to come again, in the meantime I will be practicing the dishes we learnt at home!

Had a great experience with a great cook and a lovely group of 5 other people! Went to explore the market, learn about the food, the history, the everyday life. . . . Cooked really nice food that I will easily replicate back home!! Definitely recommend!!

Gastronomic tourism is a high-yield type of tourism for business operators, and it has a high potential to increase tourist spending (Richards, 2012). It is also understood from the comments that tourists find the cooking courses they attended worth their money:

We would highly recommend taking this class, even if you are a novice cook. Definitely worth the money.

The price for this experience was well worth it. I highly recommend. . . .

Discussion

In this study, the experience dimensions suggested by Pine and Gilmore were examined within the case of cooking courses, which have become

increasingly popular in destinations especially in recent years. In the light of the reviewed comments, it is concluded that cooking courses are highly expressive on all four basic experience dimensions. However, it was found that tourists who attend cooking courses had more of the education and entertainment experiences, while the esthetics and the escapism were less clearly found, as they call for more passive participation. Some tourists expressed their cooking course as their most memorable experience in Turkey. Bell (2014) suggested in her study that home cooking courses could offer a combination of entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism. Pine and Gimore (1998, 1999) called these four experiences at the same time “magic moments” and identified the richest experiences as the “sweet spot,” containing all four dimensions and balance the active and passive consumer participation elements that the customers are both inspired and involved in. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) called the optimum experience as “flow.” In this context, the most common definition of flow or optimum experience is that time no longer passes for the person as usual. Hom Cary (2004) also used the concept of “serendipitous moment” similar to the sweet spot concept. Hence, in order to provide memorable, positive, and optimum experiences to the consumers it is important that the dimensions of experience mentioned above are kept at the maximum level at the same time.

In cooking courses, providing information about new recipes, different preparation and cooking techniques, different spices and ingredients, new service and presentation techniques, the history of food and beverages, and the tips of cooking provides tourists with an education experience. On the other hand, the cheerful class environment, the positive sincerity of the instructors, shopping and cooking together can give the tourists an entertainment experience. The positive and sincere relationships that are emphasized by many researchers (Bell, 2014; Buczkowska, 2014; Richards, 2012) here can provide rich entertainment experiences. Likewise, the environments, shopping areas (markets, shops, production areas, etc.), kitchen tools and equipment, and plate presentations can provide esthetic experiences to tourists during the course. For tourists, travel can often be an escapism experience in itself. As a matter of fact, tourists have

been looking for different experiences during their holiday in recent years and have been participating in various activities to get rid of the holiday routine. One of the most important among these activities is the cooking courses. Therefore, it is very important to provide services in four areas of experience to tourists who attend cooking courses for the purpose of having memorable experiences.

According to Williams et al. (2018), if a destination can offer tourists at least six interesting gastronomic experiences, there would be a bigger desire to travel towards that destination and stay there longer. The authors categorized gastrotourists into two categories as deliberate and incidental, and suggested that gastronomic experiences are important for both categories of tourists. In this context, the cooking courses that are organized in destinations can also offer interesting gastronomic experiences as well as attract both deliberate and incidental gastrotourists. Especially the six plus gastronomic experiences noted in the study of Williams et al. (2018) can be offered to tourists only within cooking courses. The content of a thoroughly planned cooking course is quite rich. A cooking organization that starts with a food market visit can include a range of activities. Shopping from regional food producers (herbalists, butchers, delicatessen, grocers, etc.), cooking together, tasting, having conversations about eating and drinking, learning the service techniques specific to the region, getting to know local preparation and kitchen tools can be given as examples of these activities. In this regard, cooking courses alone have the potential to offer tourists many gastronomic experiences.

Tourists who attend cooking courses express that they will attend such courses again following their positive experiences. Likewise, it is evident from online reviews that tourists are recommending others to take such cooking courses as well. Widjaja et al. (2018) found that the quality of culinary experience has an effect on both the culinary experience satisfaction and the destination experience satisfaction in a positive and significant aspect. According to findings of the study, gastronomic experiences in destinations can affect the behavioral intentions of tourists. The results obtained within the cooking courses support previous studies (Barnes et al., 2016; Cetin & Okumuş, 2018; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Ji et

al., 2016; Widjaja et al., 2018). Moreover, almost all of the tourists who attended cooking courses shared comments stating that it was worth the money they paid. Hence, the tourists are willing to spend more on tourist products where they can get their entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism experiences. In many studies (see Richards, 2012; Williams et al., 2018), it is stated that tourists are willing to spend more for intensive gastronomic experiences. In this regard, cooking courses enable regions and businesses to earn more income from tourists.

Cooking courses can be the most memorable experience for tourists during their holidays. It is also stated that the information learned in the courses can be withheld in their daily lives, and that this information will be shared with their relatives. Ongoing activities such as cooking courses in daily life can lead to an increase in long-term positive feelings towards the destination. Thanks to the experiences gained from cooking courses it is possible for tourists to find alternatives to the ordinariness of daily life. Especially tourists can have a pleasant time with their relatives and different food cultures. Potentially, sharing food memories can relieve the stress of daily life.

Gastronomic experience is highly dependent on the interactions of producers and consumers (Richards, 2012). Sthapit et al. (2019) pointed out that cocreation, servicescape, and experience intensification are effective in ensuring memorable gastronomic experiences. Robinson and Getz (2013) emphasized the importance of authentic and cultural dining experiences as well as the sharing of these experiences with others, which are the social dimensions of eating. Different cuisines enhance the variety of the experience. In addition, this experience can be more effective if the tourist is cooking together (interactive) with others (Buczowska, 2014). Considering all these aspects, cooking courses in destinations can contribute to the socialization and interaction of tourists (tourist–tourist, tourist–personnel, tourist–local people interaction), and this study shows some aspects of the potential benefits for tourists as well as destinations.

Conclusions

In recent years, tourists' demand for gastronomy has increased and various gastronomic products

have been discovered in destinations to meet this demand. Cooking courses are also an important type of gastronomic product that has become widespread in tourist destinations in recent years. However, the experience economy in the tourism sector had a great impact, and the destinations and/or businesses that can offer experiences in four areas of experience (education, entertainment, esthetics, escapism) began to be preferred more by tourists. While businesses and/or destinations that can offer such experiences can gain more competitive advantage and revenue, businesses and/or destinations that fail to improve their product variety and experiential aspect are less preferred and become unable to compete with their competitors. For this reason, it is critical for destinations and businesses to discover touristic products with rich experiential aspects, and cooking courses is one of many ways to proceed.

When examining the online comments from tourists who attended the cooking courses, it was found that most of the comments were positive, although some tourists shared their dissatisfaction too. Tourists especially complained about the high prices, the lack of hygiene, and the inadequate chefs giving the cooking course. For this reason, it is essential for service providers to balance the price–value relationship of cooking courses, for those working as chefs to be professional, and especially to pay attention to hygiene rules. As a consequence to the COVID-19 epidemic, it is obvious that hygiene and sanitation will become even more important for tourists in the upcoming years.

Although Pine and Gilmore's experience areas are widely used, there are also some criticisms of the theory. In particular, such criticisms point out that experience economy practices are not required for every business line, that the experience areas are not applicable to each consumer, the content of the experience areas is not fully understood, and that they are insufficient today (Poulsson & Kale, 2004; Richards, 2015). According to Agapito et al. (2013), experiences involve the stimulation of multiple senses. Experiences occur when tourists see, hear, feel, smell, and taste physically in their destination (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). The comments provided do not give a lot of information about such multitude of aspects, which may indicate that the education at the courses in this study, even when

found satisfactory by the tourists, do not use the full potentials in terms of experience design.

By taking into account the changing social situation of gastronomy, Richards (2015) analyzed the reasons for this change within the experience economy. The author has examined the change in three stages from past to present. The first generation of gastronomic experiences based on the production of themed experiences for consumers; the second generation of experiences cocreated by producers and consumers; and the third generation of gastronomic experiences related to the development of communities around gastronomy and food. Third-generation gastronomic experiences are emphasized by the holistic nature of food experiences and their ability to connect people around the shared consumption of all-sensory products. In this context, the Richards (2015) stated that Pine and Gilmore's (1999) dimensions are insufficient to offer third-generation gastronomic experiences in destinations or tourism businesses, and that they should go beyond their original recipe. Despite all, the validity and applicability of Pine and Gilmore's fields of experience in the tourism sector remains high. However, it is necessary to further elaborate the content of the areas of experience that are determined within the experience economy in the specific context. Actually, entertainment is a type of positive emotional reaction and often involves activities and participation (Luoh et al., 2020), and more can be done in the field of gastronomy. In addition, there is a need to further understanding of the emotional outcomes, which are gained through the learning experience. According to Luoh et al. (2020), learning for fun covers a mix of discovery, exploration, mental stimulation, and excitement.

This study revealed the role of cooking courses, which is a specific field of gastronomic tourism in the context of experience economy. Moreover, thanks to the online posts (comments, photos, videos, etc.), it is predicted that cooking courses can offer a different perspective to the studies to be performed in the field of tourism. For this reason, the study contributes to the field of tourism and gastronomy both in theoretical and practical aspects.

One of the most important limitations of the study is to use only the netnography method as a data collection method. Therefore, further studies may use different data collection methods. The

experience, motivation, and expectations of tourists can be investigated in more depth, especially by interviewing tourists of different nationalities who attend cooking courses. Besides, studies can be conducted on subjects such as the content, functioning, and social effects of cooking courses. The 4E (education, entertainment, esthetics, escapism) model was preferred in the research because it is widely used in the field of tourism and the model stands out more than other experience models when online comments are read. As a matter of fact, similar studies may be suggested by using different experience models in future studies.

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