

# Chapter 4

## A Melting Pot of Taste and Heritage: Culinary Tourism in New Orleans, Louisiana

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Food tourism has become a global phenomenon. The rise of social media, celebrity chefs, and food influencers have all helped to ignite in some and elevate in others a heightened passion for food today. New Orleans, Louisiana is an iconic world-renowned destination serving as a beacon of culinary excellence, drawing food enthusiasts from around the globe. Since its founding, New Orleans has been exceptionally molded by its rich cultural foundation. Each cultural influence has intertwined creating an experiential that is unique, compelling, and captivating for both domestic and global visitors. The culinary landscape is a testament to its diverse heritage, encompassing French, Spanish, African, Haitian, and Creole influences. The historical roots of these influences have deeply shaped New Orleans' food scene, evident in iconic dishes like gumbo, jambalaya, and beignets. Each bite seems to cause a multi-sensory immersion and tells a story of cultural exchange and culinary evolution, reflecting centuries of tradition and innovation.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism, often referred to as the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of pleasure and/or purpose, has evolved dramatically and increased significantly in recent decades due to heightened advertising, strategic marketing, effective branding practices, and worldwide technological communications. Those who travel for tourism are commonly referred to as tourists. “In general, a tourist is a temporary leisured person who “voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change” (Smith, 1989, p. 1). With increased competition in recent years, tourism providers have struggled to find a unique selling proposition (USP) essential to differentiate themselves locally and internationally (Lane 2009). Although food has long been recognized as an inextricable and ubiquitous component of the destination experience (Hall & Sharples, 2004) for tourists; “increasingly, destinations

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are turning to local food initiatives to attract new consumers” (Everett, 2012, p. 537). As a result, the popularity of food-motivated travel has grown significantly in recent years. The cuisine and culture of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the United States, has been a unique and compelling draw for tourists from around the world for decades. However, many of the influences which fostered many of New Orleans renowned dishes have been undervalued. This chapter will explore the city’s rich culinary heritage and the unique influences that have contributed significantly to its iconic identity as a melting pot of taste and heritage. It will also address the often-overlooked contributions of this culinary heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Culinary Tourism

Hall and Sharples (2003) describe food-motivated travel as “the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region” (p.10). Further, food tourism is the “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel” (Hall & Sharples, 2004, p. 10). Today, the act of traveling for the sole purpose of exploring a destination through food and means of tourism has come to be known as culinary tourism (Long, 2004). Food in tourism, where it is a major motivation, has also been alluded to as food or gastronomic tourism (De Vera, 2019). Simply put, it is the intentional exploration of food motivation as the purpose of travel. Food can be an emotive and experiential component of hospitality, tourism, and gastronomic experiences (Ellis et al., 2018; Lee, 2022; Long, 2004;). This rapidly growing and increasingly popular segment of the tourism industry, where food is a primary trip motivator (Quan & Wang, 2004) centers around exploring, experiencing, and enjoying unique and authentic culinary traditions, foods, and beverages that reflect the culture and heritage of that destination. The act of tourism solely for culinary purposes has grown to encompass a plethora of food-related activities, including dining at local restaurants (unknown to renowned), sampling street vendor food, in-home dining, visiting local delis and markets, attending food festivals, touring farms, vineyards, and breweries, as well as participating in cooking classes and farm to table experiences promoting local food, ingredients, and production. These experiences provide a window through which travelers can acclimate to the local food culture, understand the historical and cultural significance of traditional culinary practices, integrate themselves firsthand into a new culture for full cultural immersion, and view the world from an unfamiliar perspective.

Key drivers of culinary tourism for today’s diverse travelers are the quest to embark on adventure, exploration, and memory-making. Culinary Tourism spotlights the intersection between exploring new destinations and experiencing and savoring their unique food offerings. The essence of culinary tourism lies in the pursuit of new and authentic food-related experiences that go beyond mere consumption to include the discovery of unique culinary traditions, ingredients, and cooking methods. It provides an opportunity to connect with an area’s history, people, and traditions. Food provides nourishment, pleasure, and an intimate connection that bridges the taster to their spaces and places of eating, as well as the environment (Lee, 2022; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Ellis et al., 2018; Sims, 2009).

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