South Tyrol Culinary Tourism: Gaps between Expectation and Fulfillment for German Travelers

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Introduction

- Interest in culinary tourism has seen significant growth over the past few years.
- With that said, culinary tourism as a research topic is a relatively new and under-researched phenomena.
- The study objective is to bridge this gap and extent research on:
  - the relationship among expectations prior to visit,
  - fulfillment of these expectations post visit
  - and the relative importance of culinary aspects compared to other aspects such as nature and landscape, wellness, sports, etc.

Background

- The ability to identify the key drivers of satisfaction based on culinary tourism attributes is an important tool.
- The expectation-disconfirmation paradigm appears related to a similar technique called importance-performance analysis (IPA) (Martilla & James, 1977).
- Traditionally, the IPA grid utilizes the mean performance attribute score and the mean importance attribute score creating the 2X2 matrix (Smith & Costello, 2009)
- Following expectation-disconfirmation theory, this study uses a variation on the IPA approach to assess attribute satisfaction.
- Considers the impact of prior expectations and fulfillment of expectations on culinary and other tourism attribute satisfaction.

Methodology

- Survey data was collected over three days in Bolzano, Italy.
- Contained 46 items with sections on expectations, fulfillment, potential and related questions of various tourism activities.
- Study focuses on the relationship between expectations and fulfillment for German travelers.
- 525 German tourist sample.
- Data was analyzed using an expectation-fulfillment process to assess tourist activities that had
  - high expectations/high fulfillment (meeting expectations),
  - high expectations/low fulfillment (disconfirmation of expectations),
  - low expectations/high fulfillment (exceeding expectations),
  - low expectations and low fulfillment (meeting expectations – but unlikely to create return visits.
- The survey used a 5-point scale for expectation levels and fulfillment levels. The actual means were used as break-points between high and low quadrants to form and 2X2 grid.
Expectations and fulfillment

- Fourteen attributes were included in the survey.
- Five were non-culinary tourism activities
  1) nature and landscape, 2) wellness and spa, 3) local culture, 4) sports, and 5) special events.
- Nine attributes were related to culinary tourism activities:
  1) traditional dishes of the region, 2) fine dining, 3) regional wines, 4) authentic food products that can be purchased, 5) authentic food products on restaurant menus and wine lists, 6) friendliness of staff in the hotels and restaurants, 7) friendliness of staff in wineries, 8) competencies of staff in hotels and restaurants, and 9) competencies of staff in wineries.

Results

- Significant differences between expectations and fulfillment were calculated using paired t tests.
- 13 of the 14 attributes fulfillment perceptions exceeded expectations and six had significant positive differences.
- All of the eight culinary tourism related attributes and four out of five of the general tourism attributes had positive differences.
- Local culture was the only attribute with a significant and negative disconfirmation score.
- Significant positive disconfirmation scores:
  - Non-culinary: Sports and special events
  - Culinary: 1) fine dining, 2) regional wines, 3) friendliness of staff in the hotels and restaurants, and 4) competencies of staff in hotels and restaurants.
- These significant differences indicate high satisfaction of these tourism attributes.
- Exceeding attribute expectations is likely to increase the likelihood of return visits and positive word of mouth (O’Leary & Deegan, 2005).

Figure 1. Expectation-fulfillment attribute grid

- Q1: Non-tourism drivers
- Q2: Tertiary tourism drivers
- Q3: Secondary tourism drivers
- Q4: Primary tourism drivers

- Nature and landscape
- Traditional dishes
- Regional wines
- Friendliness
- Competencies
Discussion and Conclusions (1)

- Two methods were used to assess the impact of gaps between expectations and fulfillment on customer satisfaction for German visitors to South Tyrol.
- Thirteen of the 14 attributes provided evidence of implied satisfaction based on the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm i.e. a positive disconfirmation gap.
- Seven of the 14 had a large enough gap to statistically support the notion of disconfirmation.
- One tourism attribute (local culture) demonstrated a negative gap.
- Six demonstrated a positive disconfirmation gap (nature and landscape, sports, special events, fine dining, regional wines, friendliness of staff, and competencies of staff).
- This assessment indicates that German visitors are 1) satisfied with the six attributes, having a positive disconfirmation gap, 2) dissatisfied with one item with a negative disconfirmation gap, and 3) neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the remaining seven attributes that had a non-significant gap (e.g., Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Discussion and Conclusions (2)

- To further elaborate, the study used a modified version of an IPA grid with high/low expectations and high/low fulfillment to create a 2X2 matrix.
- In so doing, the study divided the attributes into three categories: primary tourism drivers, secondary tourism drivers and tertiary tourism drivers for the South Tyrol region.
- Primary tourism drivers include 1) nature and landscape, 2) traditional dishes of the region, 3) regional wines, 4) friendliness of staff in the hotels and restaurants, 5) friendliness of staff in wineries, 6) competencies of staff in hotels and restaurants, and 7) competencies of staff in wineries.
- Secondary drivers include sports and authentic food products purchased or on restaurant menus and wine lists.
- Four attributes fell within the tertiary tourism driver category with relatively low prior expectations and fulfillment. These items include wellness and spa, local culture, special events, and fine dining.
- Visitors were moderately satisfied with these attributes due to relatively low expectations prior to visiting South Tyrol.
Implications

- In total, this study demonstrates the value of culinary tourism activities as significant drivers of tourism for German visitors.
- These activities have a strong reputation outside of Italy based on prior expectations as well as the ability to exceed these expectations through culinary product and service fulfillment.
- Unlike many other hospitality service situations, this is a case where the region does not disappoint with 'over promising and under delivering'.
- The use of the two methods of tourism attribute assessment provided a better picture of potential satisfaction levels of German visitors than using one method alone.
- Thus, this two-step process minimizes some of the critiques of the disconfirmation theory and IPA methodology (e.g., Oh, 2001; Petrick, et al., 2001).

Limitations

- It should be noted that this study has several limitations.
- First, the study considered primarily culinary tourism attributes for German travelers in a specific region known for its unique culinary qualities.
- Therefore, these relationships are not generalizable to other tourism destinations where other tourism attributes may be primary drivers for the region as well as cultural differences based on place of origin of visitors.
- Second, the participants were part of a convenience sample from several locations in the city of Bolzano.
- While this sampling method is common in this type of study (Beer, et al., 2012; Smith & Costello, 2009), internal threats to validity cannot be totally ruled out due to this non-random research design.

Future Research

- Future research should consider a variety of relationships for culinary tourists, satisfaction and intentions to revisit.
- For example, the relationship between attribute importance, expectations and performance is not clearly articulated in the literature and it is not explicit in how these relationships apply to the culinary tourist.
- Empirical testing of the impact of individual culinary attributes on satisfaction and other consumer behaviors would be valuable for both practitioners and academics to provide guidance on:
  - how time
  - and resource allocations can be used to maximize the customer experience and return on investment.