

## COOKING CLASSES AS A NEW GASTRONOMIC TOURISM PRODUCT

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**Abstract.** Tourism development contributes to the development of countries and regions. Gastronomic tourism, organization of culinary master courses, inclusion of special meals in the tourist offer can contribute to the diversification, originality and competitiveness of regional tourist offers. The aim of the study is to examine culinary master workshops as a gastronomic tourist product. The research shows that master culinary courses are offered mainly in the capital, their supply is limited in other regions, and information about organized master classes is missing.

**Key words:** master classes, cooking classes, gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, food tourism.

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### Introduction

In Latvia, rural tourism establishments that provide not just accommodation, but catering services as well, become increasingly popular. Catering as a service is very important in the rural tourism offer, it is highly demanded by customers, and, hence, the catering as a service in countryside cottages must be supported. Particularly, maintaining the customs and knowledge of traditional cooking and recipes of Latvian dishes should be encouraged (*Latvian Rural Tourism Association Lauku ceļotājs, 2005*). As well, the rural cottages could organize masterclasses for various target audiences interested in cooking, offer various national cuisines, including promotion of traditional food culture in region as a tourism product (Silicka et al., 2014). Indeed, the topicality of the theme is reinforced by the fact mentioned by the World Tourism Organization that gastronomy as an essential part of history, tradition, and identity has become a major motivation for selection a travel destination, (*UNWTO, 2017*).

Food is a vital necessity for traveller, so catering is one of the key elements in the tourism offer. Each country strives to surprise its guests, and the national cuisine is the way to do this alongside providing new experience for the tourists while satisfying their desires, needs, and curiosity, since food is one of the strongest cravings and one of the deepest pleasures apart from the cultural and historical monuments, nature, and adventures. Silicka and Dembovska in their article "Research and analysis of gastronomic tourism in Latgale region" emphasize that nowadays travellers consider not only the need for food but also search for the gastronomic and aesthetic satisfaction (*Silicka et al., 2014*).

More and more in the media and in various publications, the concept "gastronomic tourism" appears, still the common understanding of it is – "food". How many people and tourists understand the true meaning and content of this concept? Gastronomic tourism in Latvia increasingly develops, still Latvian residents and tourists have little information on what gastronomic tourism is, how and where they can get acquainted with it, taste it, and enjoy it.

Gastronomic tourism differs not only among various countries but also among various regions within the territory of one country. Hence, the culinary classes could become an excellent way to demonstrate these differences.

By defining the problem, the authors believe the gastronomic tourism providers operating in the gastronomic tourism sector expect active demand and people's interest in the products and services provided. Consequently, there must be a wide and unique range of products and services. Thus, the main goal and task of gastronomic tourism service providers is to satisfy the needs and wishes of customers. To meet these expectations, it is necessary to explore and develop new tourism products, including cooking classes. Indeed, the focus on every detail of the tourism product and the range of gastronomic tourism products will lead to better responsiveness not only by tourists but also by the local population. Harrington and Ottenbacher in their study emphasize the Hunter's opinion that despite the fact that food tourism has been studied very little, the growth of culinary tourism, culinary classes, and their development offer many opportunities for the hospitality and tourism organizations (*Harrington et al., 2010*).

**Research hypothesis:** Cooking classes as a part of gastronomic tourism offer would contribute to diversification, originality, and competitiveness of the tourism products in the regions.

**Research aim:** To explore cooking classes as a gastronomic tourism product.

**Research tasks:**

1. To explore development and trends of gastronomic tourism product.
2. To explore the gastronomic tourism product offer in Latvia.
3. To explore and analyse the offer of cooking classes in Latvia.
4. To develop conclusions and proposals regarding the offer of cooking masterclasses in Latvia.

**The research methods:** the logical and constructive methods, the scientific induction method, synthesis, the monographic method and the graphic method.

### **Development and trends of gastronomic tourism product**

Often food products are used to create a destination brand, exploited as a competitiveness tool, and when it is strategically developed at the national or local level, it has a potential to enhance visitors' experience by use of this unifying cultural attribute at the same time increasing visitors' loyalty (*Hussain et al., 2012*). Gastronomic tourism is further enriched by participation in culinary courses and/or visits to the traditional production facilities (for example, wine tourism, which combines tastings, classes, visits to the wineries and businesses).

In the context of gastronomic tourism, the terms "*food tourism*", "*tasting tourism*", "*culinary tourism*" are used, still, the idea is the same, therefore the authors have compiled the definitions of "gastronomic tourism".

Table 1

## Definitions of the term "gastronomic tourism"

Authors	Term	Definition	Key words
Silicka I., Dembovska I. ( <i>Silicka et al., 2014</i> )	Gastronomic tourism	Activity that offers gaining a unique and unforgettable experience by enjoying food and drinks	Gaining experience
Caribbean Niche Markets ( <i>Caribbean Niche Markets, 2017</i> )	Gastronomic tourism	Refers to the travel destinations where local food and drinks are the main travel motive	Travel motive
Hall C.M. and Mitchell R. ( <i>Hall et al., 2001</i> )	Food (culinary) tourism	Visiting food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and special places where food taste and/or typical food specifics are the main reasons for travel	Food taste and/or typical food specifics
Wolf E. ( <i>Wolf, 2002</i> )	Gastronomy and culinary tourism	The opportunity to enjoy an unforgettable experience of food and drink has a major impact on travel motivation and behaviour	Travel motivation and behaviour
Scarpato R. ( <i>Scarpato, 2002</i> )	Gastronomy	The driving force behind different cultures, while promoting tourism development and sustainability	Driving force
Aysu A. ( <i>Aysu, 2019</i> )	Gastronomic tourism	Type of <b>tourism</b> that is based on visiting food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and special places in order to taste a special type of food, to observe the process of food production or to eat a food cooked by a famous chef; today it is quite popular	To observe food production or to eat

Culinary tourists are not just interested in the food (which is, of course, purchased at the local market) they enjoy, they also want to learn more about the history of food, its production, and its 'journey' up to the plate (*Coppola, 2016*). Gastronomic tourism becomes a distinguishing feature of the regional identity.

Organizations of gastronomic tourism destinations have estimated that the gastronomic tourism affects both the gastronomic tourism destination and the businesses (*Coppola, 2016*):

- It enhances the visibility and attractiveness of a particular region through a range of differentiated values offered (Where can you enjoy the best *gazpacho* and *tortillas*, if not in Spain? What about the best pizza? The most warm-hearted stew?);
- It helps to protect the identity and culture of the destination;

- It promotes in-bound tourism and promotes tourism throughout the year (it is not seasonal);

- It attracts mostly mid-level visitors who can afford to pay a little more to gain valuable experience.

Food producers and suppliers also have their own opinion about the impact of gastronomic tourism on the destination and businesses of the industry:

- Development of culinary tourism provides a great opportunity to create new products (for example, food tasting, workshops, etc.). Why to sell chocolate only in the store if people can be invited to learn how to make chocolates?

- By offering gastronomic experience, not just food, the value of the product increases.

- When a business is transformed into an experienced business, it becomes unique.

Then it has not only the product to offer but also the story to tell.

Gastronomic tourism promotes the local economy by increasing the number of visitors and producing new products, and it is not seasonal (*Coppola, 2016*). The interest in gastronomic tourism is defined by (*Litavniece et al., 2016*):

1. Existing income and spending patterns;
2. Demographic characteristics and changes in the number of households;
3. Individualism;
4. Multicultural consumer;
5. The role of famous chefs and the media;
6. Prosperity and food;
7. Food as an oasis;
8. Use of the Internet;
9. Desire for new experience and cultural heritage;
10. Food Science.

Development of gastronomic tourism is enhanced by (*Coppola, 2016*):

- Food tourism should be part of the goal strategy, offering visitors a comprehensive experience;

- There should be close cooperation and dialogue all agents in all processes: food suppliers, travel providers, travel agencies, etc.;

- An online presence should be provided. Promotion is crucial if you want to attract more tourists;

- High-quality local products related to the identity of the region should be offered and promoted;

- Storytelling marketing should be considered: the story is a great way to connect food to the culture;

- Innovations should always be sought without losing the regional identity.

### **Gastronomic tourism products in Latvia**

Latvia is involved in the European Regions of Gastronomy Platform that is expected to help promoting local, ecological products and gastronomic values of the regions. In 2017, the Riga – Gauja Region was entitled to be the European Region of Gastronomy. Within the project, in cooperation of cities Riga, Sigulda, Cesis, and Valmiera, a special concept "Nature on a plate" was created offering to learn the diversity of gastronomy in the region. At the same year, Aarhus and Central Denmark, as well as the Lombardy Region in Italy had this status (*Live Riga, 2017*). The aim of the European Regions of Gastronomy movement is to

bring together different European regions where local food is a part of culture and history, and to work together promoting gastronomic traditions and food diversity (*Latvian Rural Tourism Association Lauku ceļotājs, 2014*). During the participation at the European Regions of Gastronomy Platform, the Riga -Gauja Region had created its own homepage, where the tourists can get acquainted with the places for gourmets.

Gastronomic tourism is closely related to the local products and artisanal food, so the terms "local products", "self-grown products", "local farm products", "home-made products" are often used.

In the spring of 2014, the professional rural tourism association "Lauku ceļotājs" conducted the tourist survey "Enjoy the countryside" (respondents: local residents and tourists from Russia, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Estonia, England, and Germany; altogether 852 respondents). The aim of the survey was to find out the respondents' interest about the opportunity to taste national dishes. According the respondents, the most typical Latvian dish is grey peas (32%), diced/ sautéed cabbage (11%), peas with bacon (10%), and rye bread (9%). The most common answers about the foods/ drinks the respondents would like to taste in the countryside were: home-baked bread, smoked fish, cow or goat milk, smoked meat, local beer and home-made cakes. In addition, the respondents would like to participate in such activities as traditional bread baking, and making the traditional midsummer cheese. Two of the most popular answers to the question "What traditional craft would you like to learn at the countryside of Latvia?" were: pottery (440 respondents) and Latvian traditional cooking (416 respondents) (*Latvian Rural Tourism Association Lauku ceļotājs, 2014*). According the survey, it can be concluded that there is interest about gastronomic tourism (traditional dishes, rural goodies, gastronomic activities).

### **Cooking classes as a new gastronomic tourism product**

One of the most demanded activities of gastronomic tourism nowadays are cooking classes, where attendees can both learn about food or drink and enjoy it as a final product, and gain experience of cooking it – participating actively (cooking) or passively (observing).

Masterclasses can be considered as a part of educational tourism and as a phenomenon of integration of education and tourism. Masterclasses provides the tourist with educational activities in the gastronomic process with the aim to develop individual important skills in the form of universal, general professional, and specialized competencies.

Masterclasses are private, chef-led practical training sessions where participants learn to cook the dishes listed in the menu (*Viesistaba, 2019a*).

Krasnova (2018) has categorized cooking classes by the target audience (adults, children, families, women, men, mixed, professional); by the theme or content (cooking, cooking a particular dish, cooking a meal, using a particular ingredient); by the form of organizing (offline classes, online classes). The authors have explored the cooking classes offered in Latvia according this classification (Table 2).

Table 2

## Classification and offer of cooking classes in Latvia (compiled by the authors)

Type	Offer
<b>By target audience</b>	
Adults	<i>Viesistaba, Riga (Viesistaba, 2019b)</i> : wine tasting, bartending classes, classes with chef, events for children, seminars.
Children	<i>Viesistaba, Riga (Viesistabas pasākumi bērniem, 2019c)</i> : Pizza workshop, Sweet anniversary.
Families	<b>Kurp.es, Riga (Kurp.es, 2019)</b> : <b>Cooking class for family VeganChef, sweets, pastries, main dishes.</b>
Women	<i>Spikeri, Riga (Spikeri, 2019)</i> : Macarons masterclass for ladies.
Men	<i>Rice Kitchen, Riga (Rice Kitchen, 2019)</i> : Group classes, just for men; mobile classes. Asian and Thai food cooking classes.
Mixed	<i>Food Anatomy by Jevgenij Ponomarjov (Food Anatomy, 2017)</i> : Steaks, festive cooking class.
Professionals	<i>Promo Cash&amp;Carry, Riga (Promo Cash&amp;Carry, 2017)</i> : <i>Promo Food Service</i> organizes culinary classes for experienced cooks, where chefs share their knowledge and introduce new products.
<b>By culinary topic (content)</b>	
Culinary	<i>Madam Briosh, Jurmala (Madam Briosh, 2018)</i> : Hachapuri; Macarons; Eclairs.
Particular dish	Elvira Bleive, Karsava municipality: Cheese master. Makes different types of cheeses and offers the opportunity to observe the cheese making process. Visitors can taste and purchase fresh milk, cottage cheese (curds) and authentic country cheese. Anna Danca, Karsava municipality: The hostess prepares herbs – leafs, flowers, and fruits of Latgalian meadows – and makes herbal teas. Visitors are offered to learn tea-making process, to taste and to purchase health-enhancing herbal teas. Aina Barsukova, Malnava pagasts, Karsava municipality: The hostess offers tasting of traditional and unconventional bread, provides family-friendly activities of baking cakes, pies, or pizzas. Gunita Murniece-Krishane, Karsava municipality: Bakes bread in a real countryside oven according to the grandmother's recipe. For those who want to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of nature, the hostess offers open-air lunch cooked from the farm products. <i>Viesistaba, Riga (Viesistaba, 2019a)</i> : Chocolate masterclass. Guests prepare small takaway gift items. Price of chocolate truffle workshop includes 3 - 4 self-made chocolate candies with different decorations, wrapping paper and ribbons.
Meal cooking	Aina Barsukova, Malnava pagasts, Karsava municipality: On request, For groups of tourists, Latgalian style meals are offered for the groups. Gunita Murniece-Krishane, Mezvidu pagasts, Karsava municipality: For those who want to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of nature, the hostess offers open-air lunch cooked from the farm products.
Possibilities of using one ingredient	Janis Krivtezhs, Malnava pagasts, Karsava municipality: The host offers an introductory narrative of the history of the Malnava Manor and the traditions of <i>shmakovka</i> (home-made brendy) brewing. <i>Valmiermuiža (Valmiermuiža, 2018)</i> : Class of butter churning and use of whey (liquid by-product of the manufacture of cheese).
<b>By form of training</b>	
Off-line	Gastronomy Institute, Riga ( <i>Gastronomijas institūts, 2018</i> ): 16 daily classes, for example, Carrot Cake masterclass, Country Cake masterclass etc.
Online	Thermomix ( <i>Thermomix, 2018</i> ): Includes a basic class for those who have just become owners of Thermomix™ and learn how to work with it, and a series of thematic classes dedicated to various celebrations and occasions

## Conclusions and suggestions

Cooking classes in Latvia are new set of events, though this activity has already gained quite a lot of popularity in Riga, its neighbourhood, and various estates and manors. When evaluating the offer of the companies, it can be concluded that mainly the cooking classes for making sweets are offered.

The authors want to mention the company *Viesistaba* as a popular and remarkable example. It is a company that organizes professional events such as wine tastings, bartending masterclasses, chef masterclasses, activities for children, various seminars, etc.

The offer of cooking classes is relatively small in the regions of Latvia. Exploring publicly accessible websites on cooking classes in different municipalities, the authors have found that there are only a few offers that are mainly seasonal or holiday-related. There is no database where the local or foreign tourists could find and choose a suitable offer.

For rural tourism owners and catering companies, cooking classes could be a source of additional income, a product for attracting tourists and locals. Masterclasses can be both fun and uniting event for families, colleagues, and groups of friends, and also the way the chef/cook/ host could strengthen relationships with visitors and broaden the circle of people interested. This makes it possible to develop a concept of local identity products based on an EU initiative that develops in European regions, based on local traditions and the specificity of culinary services, using mainly local products for cooking.

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