

## THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF POLAND AS A CULINARY TOURISM DESTINATION

Don Vincent RANGEL Jr<sup>1\*</sup>, Jan MIKOŁAJCZYK<sup>2</sup>, Robert ROMANOWSKI<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poznań University of Economics and Business, Institute of Marketing, Department of Commerce and Marketing, Student Marketing Society (SKN Marketing); don.rangeljr@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Poznań University of Economics and Business, Institute of Marketing Department of Commerce and Marketing; j.mkolajczyk@ue.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-6767-4822

<sup>3</sup> Poznań University of Economics and Business, Institute of Marketing Department of Commerce and Marketing; Robert.Romanowski@ue.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-8585-6806

\* Correspondence author

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to identify and assess the main food products that can influence culinary tourism branding in Poland. Moreover, the purpose of the research is to explore familiarity with Poland's cuisine, first associations with Poland and its brand, attractiveness of Polish cuisine and identifying interest in culinary tourism overall. Most importantly, the survey indicates if visitors are interested in visiting Poland for the primary purpose of experiencing Poland's gastronomic tourism options.

**Design/methodology/approach:** To further understand and support secondary research regarding the topic of culinary tourism, a survey was launched on google forms and posted to several mediums to collect responses. These channels include AmazonMTurk, Facebook, and personal networking. In order to gain insight into Poland's attractiveness as a gastronomic tourism destination, survey results were collected from 123 individuals. These individuals were from various different foreign countries, the majority from the United States of America.

**Findings:** The survey begins with assessing and exploring associations with culture and cuisine, cuisine and the creation of memorable experiences, intentions to seek out culinary experiences and motivations for culinary tourism. Americans would be highly interested in visiting Poland because of variety of Polish cuisine. The most important flagship products were *pierogi* and *kielbasa*. They are perceived as typical Polish food offer, that could also be an introduction to vast majority of other Polish authentic, tasty culinary achievements and rich gastronomic heritage. This kind of content should be included to tourism strategy on national level, to increase competitive advantage of Poland as tourist destination. According to research results, it would be even better to develop a culinary tourism strategy that would present content to people on the 25-55 age, with a promise of offering memorable culinary tourism experiences presented in attractive digital form. Special emphasize should be given to promotion of Wine, Beer and other alcoholic beverages. Intentional tourist know that tourist form from Spain, Italy, France or Czechia, but Polish growing wine market, very attractive craft beer market or mature spirits market could be an interesting surprise for demanding culinary tourists.

**Research limitations/implications:** The population sample was limited to 123 responses. Moreover, this study does not take into account the potential and very serious negative effects of tourism on a destination. The research was carried out before the war in Ukraine. This aspect should be taken under consideration in the future research on branding of Poland.

**Practical and social implications:** Recommendations are made for Poland's tourism strategy based on the literature review and results of the research and can be helpful in implementing a culinary tourism strategy in the future. The theoretical and practical application of the research can be used to help Poland in developing a culinary tourism strategy and further understanding of culinary tourists and their motivations to visit Poland as a destination.

**Originality/value:** This research adds value to Poland's tourism strategy and emphasizes the impact of culinary tourism on Poland's brand and image. The research results help to define Polish food flagship products to increase popularity of Poland among gastronomic tourists. Recommendations show activities, recommended by respondents, helping to increase the attractiveness of Polish gastronomic tourism based on both food and beverages heritage.

**Keywords:** gastronomic tourism, destination image, destination attractiveness, foodies, food experiences.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Food has always been a significant part of traveling and “a biological necessity, but it was perceived in most western cultures as more of an amenity and hospitality service than something that would actually drive tourism. This is partly due to limited perceptions about tourism and what constituted food worthy of attention” (Long, 2018, p. 317).

Culinary tourism as a global trend is now a primary motivator for traveling to a destination. A deeper understanding of culinary tourists can assist countries like Poland who have not fully developed their gastronomic tourism offer. This form of tourism is deeply connected to the nation brand, a nation's image, cultural heritage and identity. The linkages between food and tourism also provide a platform for local economic development” (Nwokorie, 2015).

Gastronomic tourism is a newer concept. In an increasingly globalized world, newer generations are seeking out the most unique, diverse and culturally specific eating experiences. People wish to experience a culture directly through the food and the culture surrounding what locals eat. It has become a global travel phenomenon in recent years and can often be the sole reason that someone will travel to a place within metropolitan but also rural tourism (Romanowski, 2013a).

Gastronomy is a noteworthy method in experiencing cultural heritage and could be adopted into Poland's tourism strategy to utilize this new travel trend. A county's culinary heritage can create a lasting competitive advantage, further define a nation's brand in a positive light, and distinguish a country from competing destinations by expanding the tourism offering (Dinnie, 2016). Every country has a unique culinary heritage that has been defined throughout history. Culinary tourism is still a largely unexplored field with a large number of prospects for

growth and potential for increasing visitation to a destination. It can encourage repeat visits, memorable stories and stronger emotional connections to a country and its brand. Food has a significant role in tourism, setting a vibe for a place and creating memorable experiences for people who visit new and exciting cities. Branding food in Poland can possibly create and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage if done properly. Nation branding is a technique for building a sustainable tourism industry in Poland that draws upon culture and heritage that Poland has to offer the world.

Poland's tourism industry in recent years has shown a great potential for growth as an emerging tourism market (OECD, 2018). Mature tourism markets like Italy, France, Germany etc. have all been heavily explored by the world. Poland has a strong domestic tourism market and policy and the potential for growth in the international tourism industry is exponential. Poland can further aid this growth and sustainably develop tourism through nation branding efforts in the area of gastronomic tourism. A gastronomic tourism strategy can be beneficial in strengthening Poland as a country brand and in attracting international visitors. Poland has a strong cultural heritage, robust history and a great national pride for everything that is Polish (Romanowski, 2013b). The international world can visit Poland that has utilized this heritage to increase its tourism value for visitors, both international and domestic.

The tourism industry operates within a rapidly changing global environment that is affected by the availability of information and new technologies. These factors significantly influence the development of tourism and innovation in destination management. New future trends involve adopting a tourism strategy that includes gastronomic tourism and ingesting culture in a different way than ever before.

The purpose of this paper is to identify and assess the main food products that can influence culinary tourism branding in Poland. The research include Poland's distinct culinary heritage, quality of food in Poland's major destinations and the variety of food offered across the country. To achieve the main goals, the research was carried out to determine interest in culinary tourism as a concept, effect of food experiences on a destination's image, and if food experiences are memorable and result in interest for return visits to a destination. Research concludes by exploring Poland's attractiveness as a culinary tourism destination, whether people would visit Poland with the primary purpose of exploring culinary tourism options, and what first associations exist with Poland's brand.

## 2. Literature review of gastronomic tourism concept

Food tourism has many different names that are interchangeable. Usually the name is derived from different areas of the world. Food tourism can also be known as ‘culinary’ tourism or ‘gastronomic’ tourism. These classifications all represent the same activity, but there are slight differences in the meaning that is understood by the different wordings.

Food travel and food tourism are simple and common phrases that are assumed to include beverages in the definition. There is a general assumption that when people go to eat, they also engage in drinking something as well. Using the word food in relation to tourism is considered a common and simple and reflects a distinct meaning that is not easily misunderstood (World Food Travel Association [WFTA], 2020).

According to the WFTA (2020), the phrase “Culinary tourism” is considered somewhat “elitist” and perceived as a term that adds additional meaning to “food” tourism. The word culinary can indicate or reference “time spent in professional culinary training to become a chef.” The WFTA states that this phrase already includes beverages into the overall assumption of the term.

Gastronomy tourism as a phrase is found by the WFTA (2020) as a phrase that is “used mostly in Europe, and mostly among speakers of romance languages. For them, “food travel” sounds very basic and banal – almost like cavemen hunting for food. “Gastronomy” is the term to explain an area’s culinary culture, and for them, it follows that “gastronomy tourism” makes the most sense. To native speakers, the phrase does sound a bit “elitist”, but in context, we understand why this term is used” (World Food Travel Association [WFTA], 2020).

“Within the tourism literature discussing food, numerous terms, namely ‘food and wine tourism’, ‘tasting tourism’, ‘gourmet tourism’, and most commonly ‘culinary tourism’, ‘food tourism’ or ‘gastronomic tourism’ are evident... ‘Culinary tourism’ is the most popularly adopted term to describe a form of tourism that significantly emphasizes a relationship between the insider and outsider created via food as culture...” (Ellis, Park, Kim, Yeoman, 2018, p. 250).

Gastronomic Tourism or Culinary tourism refers to the “Intentional pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, while traveling internationally, regionally or even locally” (Williams, H., Williams Jr., R.L., Omar, 2014, p. 4) This definition of culinary tourism highlights that gastronomic tourism includes “authentic”, “memorable” experiences at all levels of a destination. Something that is authentic is generally considered as something that is “real”, “traditional” or “unique”, in that the culture cannot be replicated in any other place.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) defines gastronomic tourism as “a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. Along with authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences, Gastronomy Tourism may also involve other related

activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes” (UNWTO, 2020).

Gastronomy as a concept has typically been a significant part of the tourism process. Recent years have displayed a bolstered interest in food travel and a newly defined tourism paradigm - gastronomic tourism. In the past, hungry travelers would simply visit a place to satisfy their hunger and in recent years, gastronomy has become “...a decisive influence on their choice of destination and who wish to satisfy their hedonistic and cultural appetite in addition to their physiological need to eat.” (UNWTO, 2020).

This new segment of tourism is defined by a new need to be fulfilled, a need to experience culture through food. The value of a destination can now include a specific food related segment that caters toward the needs of visitors who visit a destination primarily to experience food.

The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism: Sustainability and Gastronomy (2017) states that “the gastronomic experience is as important today as visiting a museum, enjoying the music or admiring the architecture in a destination” (UNWTO, 2017).

The growing popularity of gastronomic tourism has served as a catalyst for the creation of many different forms of this tourism type. There are a vast array of food tourism experiences and new venues to experience the culture through food are constantly being discovered (table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Gastronomic tourism forms*

No	Gastronomic tourism forms	Description
1	<b>Food Tours and Food Trails</b>	Prevalent form of culinary tourism being established and supported by tourism businesses, government tourism organizations and economic development divisions. Tours take visitors to specific venues where they can view or taste food, while trails are venue listings and maps that can then be followed by tourists on their own. Since the venues chosen will presumably receive more business than those not chosen, the selection process reflects issues of power in a very practical sense... the selection process oftentimes reflects what is considered exotic and familiar to the potential tourists rather than what is perhaps representative of the group.
2	<b>Agritourism</b>	Staying on a farm is a unique way for tourists to experience Poland’s landscape, people, agriculture, and food. Culinary experiences that occur during agritourism create authentic and local dining experiences that cannot be experienced in any other way. This segment of tourism allows visitors to experience the production process. Tourists will make their way to rural areas, experience the food production process, try traditional foods and experience a country directly through unique and very local dining experiences.
3	<b>Holiday Markets and Pop-up Markets</b>	Holiday markets are simply local, authentic, cultural heritage experiences that are mostly seasonal in nature. These markets offer products that are related to different holidays (Christmas, Easter, etc.) They provide unique insight into a culture and how they celebrate holidays, and generally seasonal products are sold that are not available any other time of the year. Pop-up Markets are randomly occurring markets that are set up on a whim, or they are scheduled and can become weekend markets.

Cont. table 1.

4	<b>Street Food and Food Trucks</b>	Food trucks and Street Foods are highly correlated. Food Trucks can essentially be considered as a vendor for street foods. “Urban dwellers – from creative class gourmards to late-night revelers, from savvy and cost-sensitive tourists to office lunch groups, from construction workers to school children – have flocked to these new businesses on wheels to get their fix of food that is inventive, authentic, and often inexpensive.” (Agyeman, 2017) These food experiences are strongly considered as gastrotourist experiences and serve an important place in the culture of many cities around the globe. It is a popular option because it allows for a great variety, a way to experience local culture, a way to socialize with locals and it helps to define a city’s cultural identity.
5	<b>Food and Beverage Museums</b>	This food tourism option is visiting to food museums and there exists are large variety of museums that have a sole purpose of displaying the history, cultural heritage, and offer valuable learning experiences to those who partake in the offer. This trend is newer in its existence in the field of “cultural tourism” and the interest in this offer is growing. Generally, visitors have the opportunity to gain knowledge about production in agriculture, and exhibits related to food. This category can include many interesting insights into products like beer, whiskey, wine, vodka, and chocolates (Bolesław, Karolina, n.d., p. 51).

Source: Own elaboration based on: Long, 2018, p. 320, Iwan, B., Iwan, K., 2014, p. 51; Agyeman, 2017.

The gastronomic tourist is a new identification of a tourist type, a person who purposely seeks out food experiences and wants to immerse themselves in the culture of a place. Food tourism is gaining importance and can be a defining experience when visiting a destination along with cultural experiences, visiting monuments and museums. “Over the years, in fact, culinary tourism is becoming an emergent alternative to mass tourism, in as much culinary tourists increasingly try to gain new experiences in an active, differentiated and unique matter than the choice of reaching standardized touristic destinations. What emerges is that many holiday destinations worldwide are very sought-after for their traditional food and beverages”. (Testa, Galati, Schifani, Trapani, Migliore, 2019, p. 3) Standardized services, goods and experiences are losing value as more people travel with the increased purpose and need to experience culture through food. Standardization in essence is subtracting from the value of a unique and differentiated cultural experience. Testa et al. (2019) essentially states that because holiday destinations are sought-after for their traditional food, destinations can increase their value of a destination by adopting culinary tourism into their tourism mix.

The food tourism industry is growing rapidly, proving that it is becoming a dominant force in tourism. The majority of people who travel consider food, and eating experiences a defining part of their vacation or visit to a destination. The massive contribution of food tourism to the overall tourism industry reflects that food is becoming a driver and primary motivation in choosing a destination. “The culinary tourism industry is now a significant force in the global economy. According to a 2016 summary, 88.2% of travelers consider food a significant component in their selection of a vacation destination, as well as in their vacation activities. The recent report by an Industry organization claims that travel and tourism contribute \$2.3 Trillion to the global economy (WTTC, 2017) shows that culinary tourists can have a major monetary impact” (Long, 2018, p. 318).

Rapid growth of gastronomic tourism influences the way of using food content in national, regional and local brand strategies. To design a successful strategy it is necessary for authorities to define main factors effecting tourists' willingness to visit a place. In the paper, tourists needs have been identified and compared to current Polish cuisine offer. Poland has a significant culinary heritage, food offering, traditional experiences and a culinary tourism infrastructure that is likely to meet the needs of foreign culinary tourists that visit Poland. Poland has created and implemented a tourism strategy that does not include culinary tourism as a primary focus for increasing visitation. This research argues for the inclusion of culinary/gastronomic tourism into Poland's overall tourism strategy.

### **3. Methodology and results of own research**

Carried-out survey aimed to determine the attractiveness of Poland as a culinary tourism destination and to investigate the potential impact on the nation's/destination's brand image.

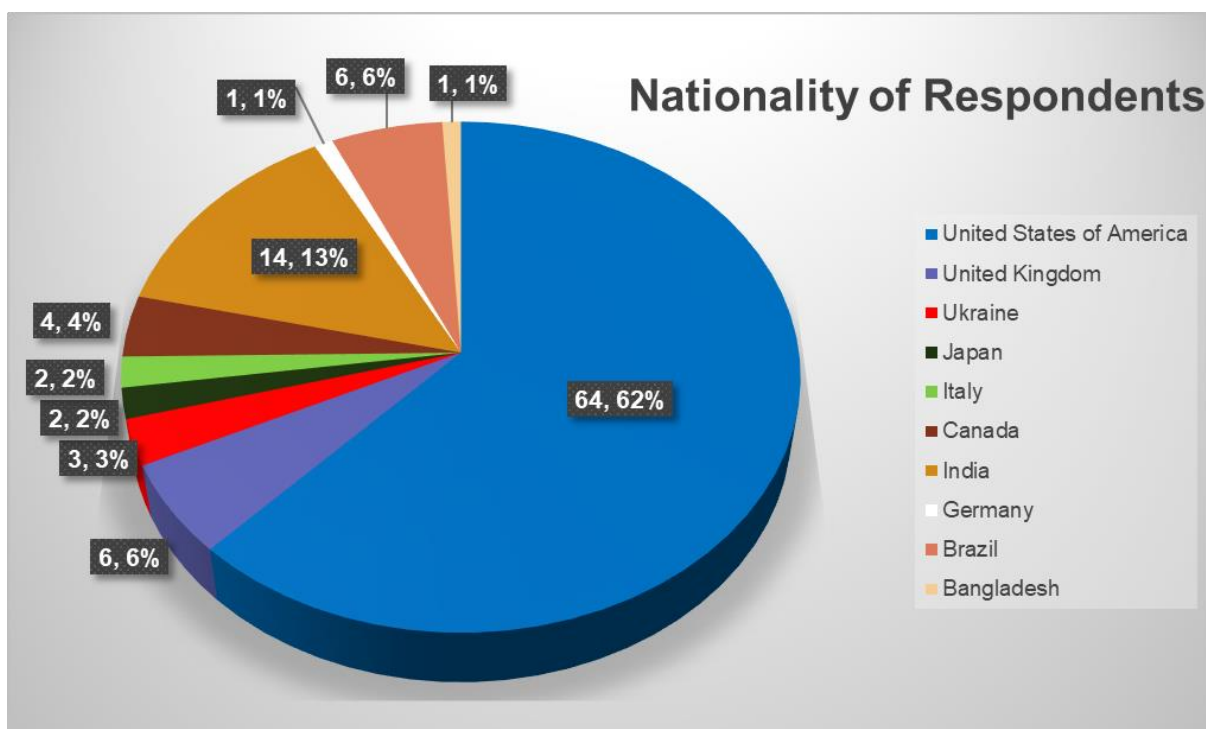
A positive result can determine if Poland's unique and diverse food offering and culinary tourism offering can serve as a source of potential differentiation from other European destinations that compete for tourists. These unique culinary tourism offerings can produce a significant competitive advantage and increase the value of a nation's brand. Differentiation can refer to that causes a shift in perception that confirms products and/or services are unique and different from the competition.

To further understand and support secondary research regarding the topic of culinary tourism, segmentations of food tourists a qualitative study and survey were launched on google forms and posted to several mediums to collect responses. These mediums include AmazonMTurk, Facebook, and personal networking. In order to gain insight into Poland's attractiveness as a gastronomic tourism destination, survey results were collected from 123 individuals and several of these responses were rejected due to survey response failure in the collection of the result, overall 20 survey responses were removed because of a failure to answer verification questions and inability to take the research seriously.

The majority of survey questions used a Likert Scale, which is a type of rating scale used to measure attitudes or opinions. Using this scale, respondents were asked to rate items on a level of agreement. 1 represented 'Strongly Disagree', 4 (in the middle of the scale) represented 'Indifferent' or 'Not sure' and 7 represented 'Strongly Agree'. The questions asked required respondents to either 'Strongly Agree' with the statement, 'Strongly Disagree' with the statement or anything in between reflected slight agreement or slight disagreement with the statement. The conducted survey consisted of 31 questions. One of these questions was an open-ended question.

A qualifying question included to help evaluate the integrity of the participants survey response, and to determine whether or not “they were taking the survey responsibly and seriously.” The open-ended question was also used as a filter to determine which respondents provided a response that related to the topic of the survey. Twenty respondents were rejected based on the inability to provide the correct answer to the verification question and the inability to provide a response that related to the topic of the survey. Several open response questions from the rejected surveys were also answered with unrelated information to the topic. For example, over 5 respondents answered the question with information related to “Poland Syndrome”, which is a condition that results in physical deformity and the term relates to a British Man with the surname of Poland.

The sample consisted of respondents from a variety of different countries. The most notable here is that 62.1% of respondents were from the United States, 13.6% of the sample were from India, 6% from the United Kingdom, 6% from Brazil, 4% from Canada and the rest were comprised of respondents from Japan, Ukraine, Italy, Germany and Bangladesh (Figure 1). The sample was nearly split in half with gender. 50.5% of the sample were female and 49.5% were male.



**Figure 1.** Nationality of respondents.

Source: own study based on personal research.

A large number of respondents are from the United States of America. These respondents have expressed a great interest in Poland. It is suggested that Poland modify their tourism strategy to target Americans. Americans are familiar with Poland and display interest in Poland’s culinary offerings. There are also many Polish-Americans who were born in the United States and have never seen their homeland. Poland’s current tourism strategy leaves out a large potential group of international visitors.



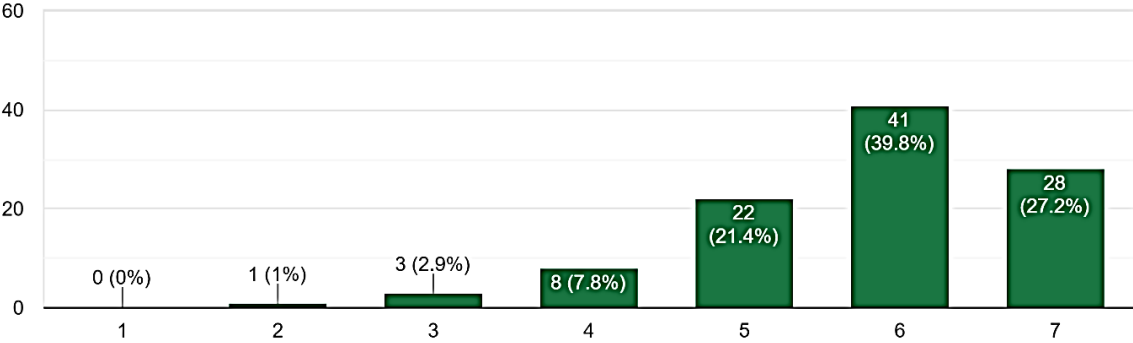


Figure 2. Identification with the Foodie Label.

Source: own study based on personal research.

A foodie was described (Figure 2) in the question description on the survey as someone who “is passionate about food and food culture”. Results indicate that 88.3% of all respondents consider themselves as a foodie. The results exceeded expectations about how people view themselves. This follows with the global trend that people are more passionate about eating experiences and food culture. In general, from a sample that included people of many different nationalities, these food experiences are considered valuable.

Future tourism research must explore segmentations within the “foodie” classifications to determine if there are different levels of interest among people who consider themselves a “foodie”. This knowledge could help destinations determine motivation and tailor food experiences to foodies that have varying levels of interest and dedication.

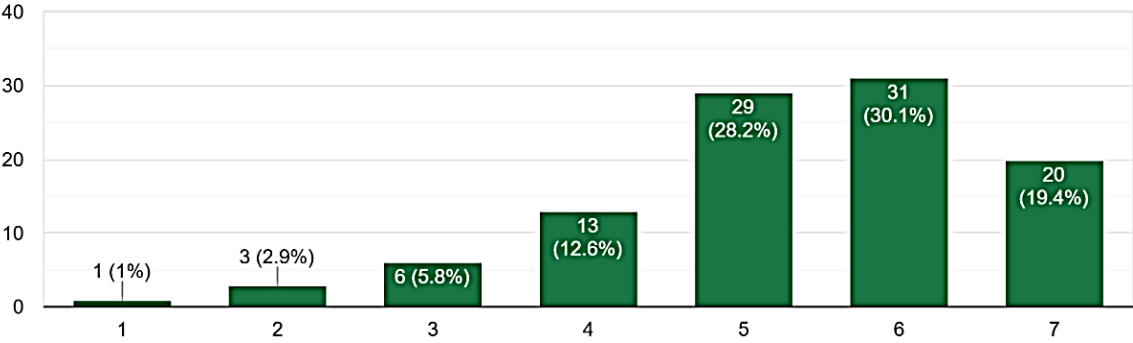
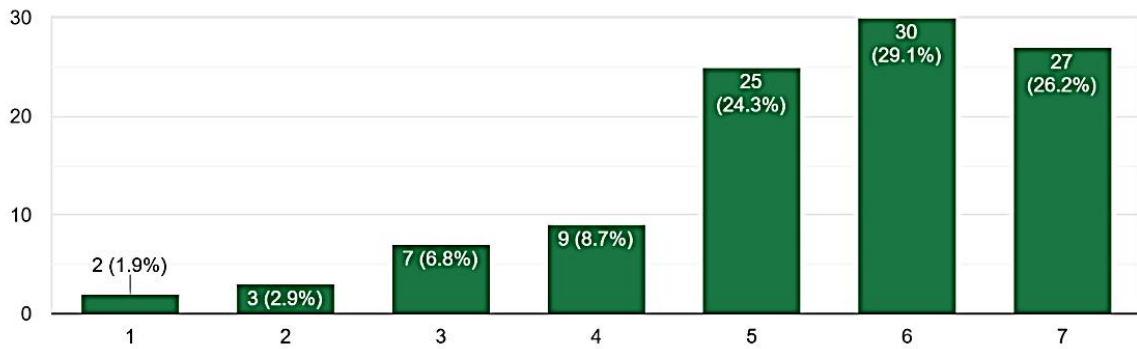


Figure 3. Food influence on Vacation Destination Selection.

Source: own study based on personal research.

The figure 3 displays a slightly different narrative than the Figure 2. It appears that even though some people consider themselves foodies, it doesn’t always mean that they will always let food influence their decision making when choosing a destination to visit. This graph displays that there are at least 10% of people who are not influenced by the food offerings of a destination when they are making a choice to visit there. Therefore, identifying as a foodie does not always indicate that food has influence on choice.

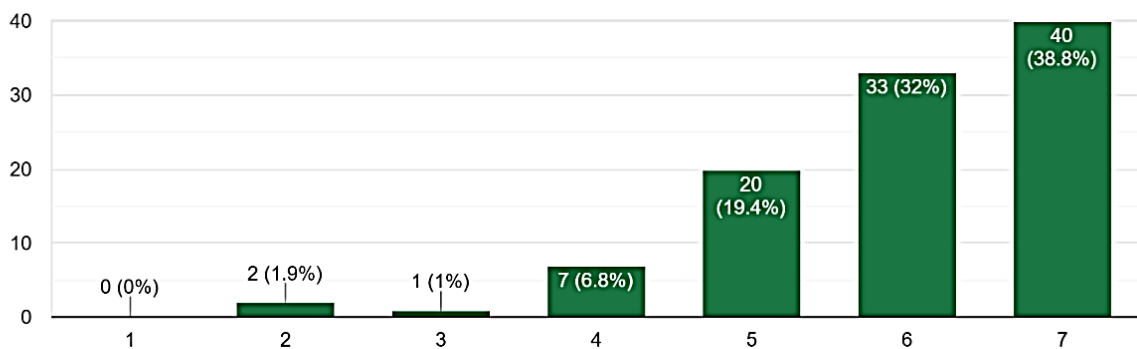


**Figure 4.** Researching Food Offerings Before Arriving to a Destination.

Source: own study based on personal research.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they research the available food offerings before they go to visit a destination (Figure 4.), meaning that their culinary experiences are planned or researched before leaving on a trip. This suggests that there is a strong possibility that the “food experience” begins long after the trip begins and that destination’s must engage in promoting the food offering online through a variety of mediums. Food research most likely will be done on social media platforms, google searches, word-of-mouth from someone within a network. Poland’s tourism organizations will have to optimize their websites and update content related to food and culinary experiences to appeal to visitors who are searching where to eat when they visit.

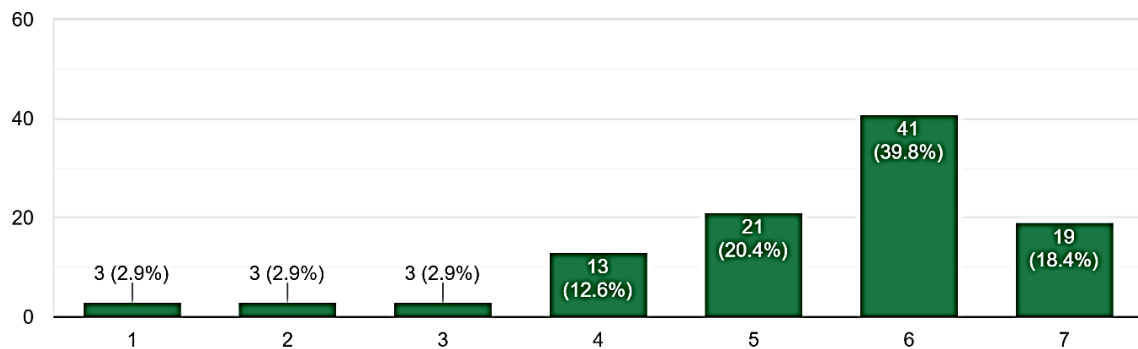
Further research can help to determine if those people consider food as the primary purpose of their visit.



**Figure 5.** Experiencing Local Food and Connection with Local Culture.

Source: own study based on personal research.

Nearly 40% of all respondents strongly agree that local food experiences are a way to connect and involve themselves in a culture of the place they are visiting (Figure 5). This data supports secondary research findings that culinary experiences create a greater value for visitors and that gastronomy tourism serves as a way to create a better experience for foodies and people who visit a destination for food experiences as a primary and secondary purpose of visit.



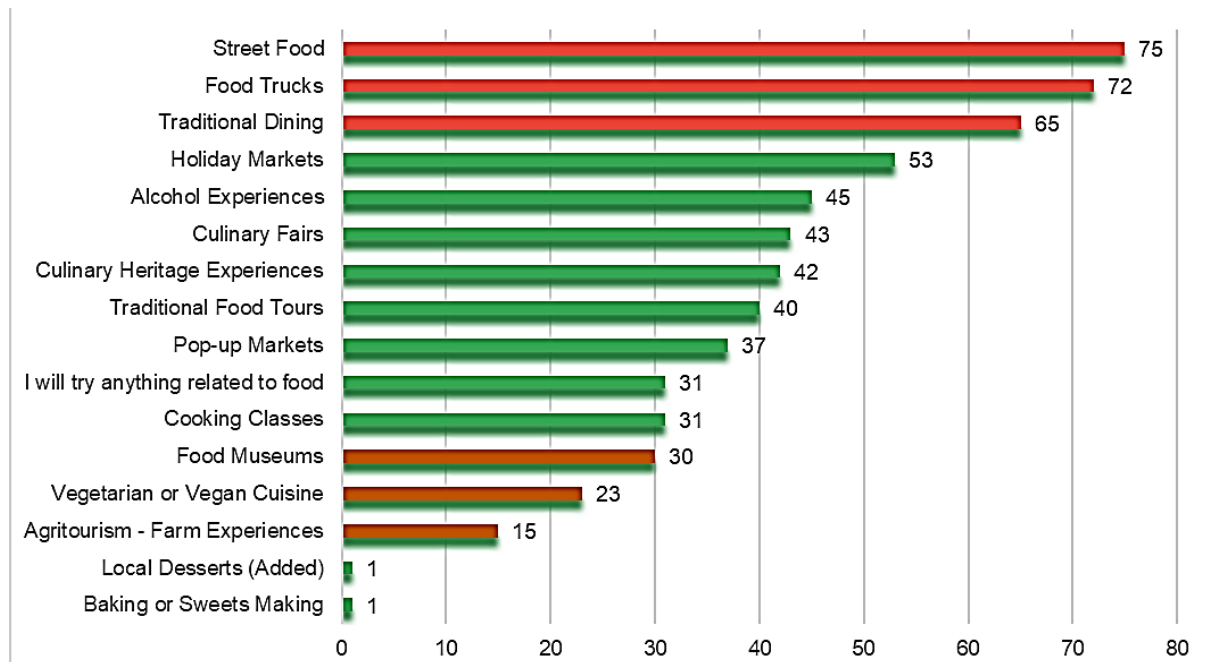
**Figure 6.** Influence of eating experiences on opinion (both positive and negative).

Source: own study based on personal research.

The likert scale (Figure 6) displays that an overwhelming amount of people more than agree (41 people or 39.8%) and Strongly agree (19 People or 18.4%) with the statement that food experiences play a role in improving or ruining the opinion of a destination that they visit. Over 20% of respondents agreed with the statement without a high degree of conviction. Over 12% of the respondents 'are not sure' or indifferent. The last almost 9% of the sample (Those who marked 1, 2, and 3) expressed that food experiences do not change their opinion of a place that they visit.

It is important to understand that the vast majority (78.6%) of people state that the food experiences available in a visited destination can effect (positively or negatively) their overall opinion of that place. Having positive eating experiences when visiting a new country can easily give shape or contribute to a positive nation brand image and encourage them to return (repeat a purchase).

Survey respondents were given the choice of many different food experiences that pique their interest (Figure 7.). The most popular option by a small margin was **street food** with 77 responses, 72% of total respondents answered this way. The second most popular option was Food Trucks followed closely by **food trucks** with 75 or 70.1% of respondents answering that this option was interesting to them. The third most notable category of culinary experiences as **traditional dining** with 67 respondents or 62.6% of respondents answering this way and showing interest. The least popular options were cooking classes and Agritourism offerings, that with 33 respondents (30.8%) and 16 respondents (15%) respectively. These answers are in a stark contrast with Poland's focus on agritourism as a form of rural development. It seems that these experiences are not as interesting to foreign visitors. Poland's current tourism strategy has a strong focus on domestic tourism and does not indicate or mention the popularity of Polish street food or food trucks.

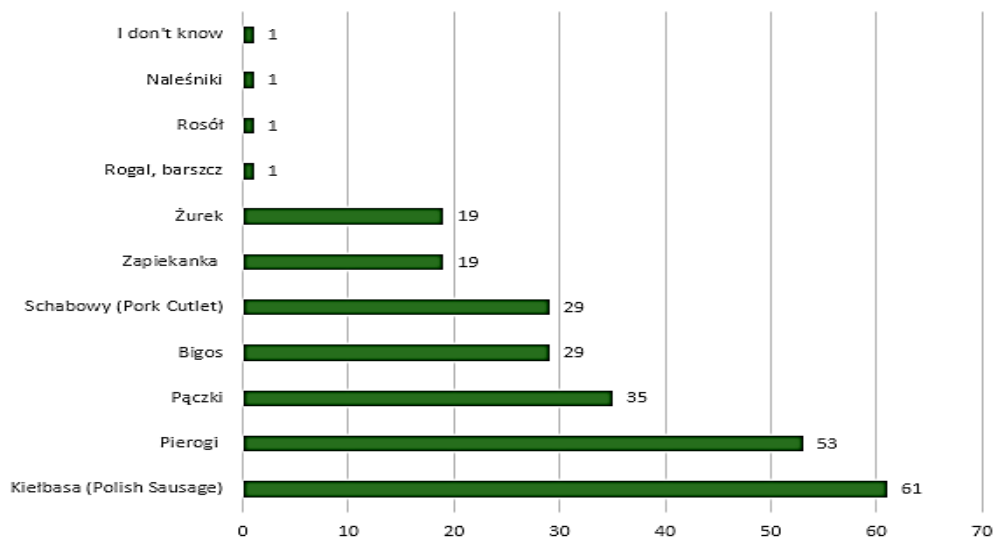


**Figure 7.** Culinary Experiences of Interest.

Source: own study based on personal research.

Food trucks are vehicles for serving street food, so it is safe to assume that street food and food trucks categories can ultimately be combined. There are minute differences between the two, but the relationship between the two is very strong. These two options are also valuable places to experience tradition food and foods with a strong cultural heritage. It is safe to say that all the categories bear a strong relationship to one another.

Alcohol experiences have 45 responses which make up 43.7% of the responses. The lower number could reflect that some respondents listed that they “do not drink”. It is obvious that this category is popular and Poland will always be able to effectively connect its alcoholic beverages with culinary tourism experiences.

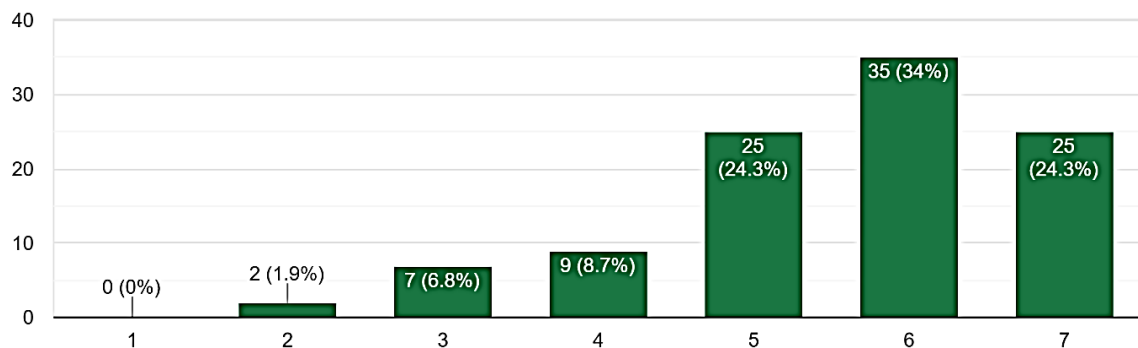


**Figure 8.** Culinary Experiences of Interest Related to Polish Cuisine.

Source: own study based on personal research.

Out of 107 responses, the foods that stand out amongst respondents are Pierogi and Kielbasa (Figure 8). Over 51% of all respondents noted that they are familiar with Pierogi. According to the results, Kielbasa is the most familiar food with 61 people or 59.2% of all respondents selecting this option. A distant third place option was Paczki with 35 votes, making up 35% of respondents. Polish mountain cheese represents the lowest level of familiarity with only 12 people indicating that they knew what this option was, that is only 11.7% of the total.

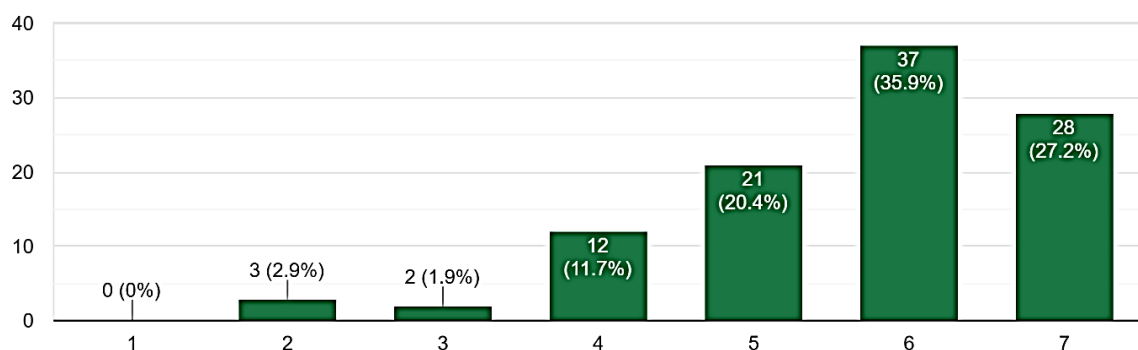
The “other” option revealed some interesting finds. A few respondents indicated familiarity with other Polish dishes that were not listed, these include: Rogale (3 mentions), barszcz (1 mention), Rosol (1 mention), Borscht (1 mention, results indicate that an American marked this response, but Borscht is not the Polish version of the dish), and finally Polskie naleśniki (thin pancakes).



**Figure 9.** Declarations of Visiting Poland after Learning about Polish Food.

Source: own study based on personal research.

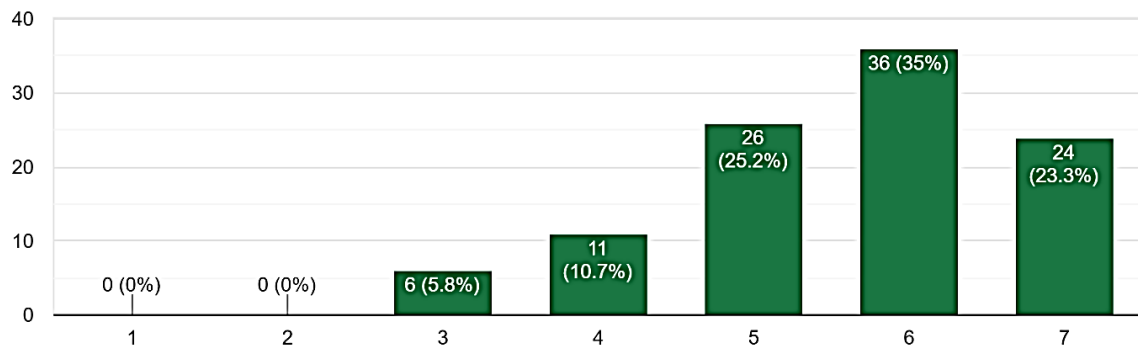
Most people strongly agree that their motivation to visit Poland would increase if they were given the opportunity to learn about the culinary offerings of Poland (Figure 9). The results indicate that Poland’s tourism and brand improvement strategy can include educational and awareness options to boost awareness of the large and unique variety and value of the food offering in Poland.



**Figure 10.** Chances of returning to Poland after Enjoying the Food Experience.

Source: own study based on personal research.

The majority of respondents (over 63%) strongly agree and agree with the statement presented in Figure 10. The majority of people would feel a greater desire to visit Poland again if they enjoyed the food experiences there the first time. Creating a valuable and memorable experience is incredibly important for prompting visitors to return to a country a second time, and gastronomy can essentially create this positive experience and encourage re-visits.



**Figure 11.** Gastronomy influence on Brand Uniqueness/Attractiveness.

Source: own study based on personal research.

The large majority of responses show very strongly that the food experiences available in Poland make Poland more unique and distinguishable from other countries. Food offerings clearly make Poland a more attractive place to visit and add a strong source of differentiation from other tourism destinations in Europe and around the world. Only 6 people or 5.8% disagree with the statement and believe that food does not make Poland a more attractive destination. Therefore, it is suggested that Poland create marketing and promotional campaigns that highlight the food experiences that can be had in Poland. It also creates great opportunity for the country to further build positive nation brand associations through Poland's culinary tourism offerings.

Qualitative knowledge on associations with Poland can serve as important information about Foreigner perceptions of Poland and its cuisine. Again, there is an overwhelming association between Poland and its food offerings, especially Pierogi and Kielbasa. Forty one out of 103 (39,8%) respondents mentioned food specifically in the open response questions. Which means that nearly 40% of all respondents' first associations with Poland are related to the food. Pierogi was mentioned specifically 8 times out of 41 (19.5%) of respondents who mentioned food. There was one respondent who alluded to Pierogi, but did not mention them by name, instead answering the question with "Dumplings". 9 respondents mentioned Sausage or Kielbasa as their first association or 21% of responses. Other responses included "sour cucumber soup", "Schnitzel", "Rosol", "pork", "Food Festivals", "Street food", "ice cream", "traditional food".

An interesting trend emerged that suggested that many people have associate “comfort food” with Poland’s culinary offering. Respondents indicate that this comfort food is “amazing, heavy and very meaty”, “Hearty, delicious and includes Potatoes”, or simply “Meat and Potatoes”. One respondent also noted that Polish food is “very fattening”, which could show concern that the food is too heavy or not good for health-conscious people. Those who are familiar with Poland understand that the culture has a large variety of foods and food offerings, including many vegetarian options. These options generally have no cognitive connection with the Polish Brand. Most people assume that the food is mostly “meat and potatoes”, which can also be assumed by the connections people have with Kielbasa sausages and Pierogi. Finally, one respondent mentioned this branding dilemma directly by saying that Poland has “Too much meat and vegetarians must have a difficult time living there.” A suggestion could be made to organizations promoting Polish Culinary Tourism offerings that there is a great opportunity to re-brand and show that Poland isn’t just about comfort food anymore and that many other interesting options are available and healthy. Lastly, one respondent mentioned that Poland has “Cheap food” which can be a common association for countries located in Eastern Europe.

Other mentions are the history, specifically Poland’s troubled history, war, World War 2, Communism, “It’s long history of suffering”, and a positive mention of Poland’s current journey and integration into western society. There are also many associations with Poland’s access to nature, natural landscapes, the mountains and its designation as “flat” and “agricultural”. Finally, there are strong religious associations with Catholicism and The Polish Pope that had strong international appeal and a strong influence on Poland’s national brand.

Poland was also mentioned to be a “cheap” and “inexpensive” destination. In relation to beverages, the only answer that occurred was people’s associations with Vodka, and one person specifically stated the “Bison Grass Vodka”. This beverage truly is Poland’s most important liquor, especially in terms of branding for foreign tourists.

There are several very powerful associations with Poland perceived by foreign tourists: the second World War, the Polish Pope, Poland’s nature and natural landscapes, Catholicism and people who know someone who is from Poland. Most importantly, the majority of associations are with food and vodka. Respondents did not mention beer or wine or any other associations with alcoholic beverages, which shows potential opportunity for education regarding wine tourism and beer tourism in Poland. Certain food products are shown to be heavily connected to Poland’s nation brand, and these products can be as important for Poland, as pizza is to Italy or sushi to Japan.

#### **4. Discussion: Marketing and Promotional Recommendations for Poland Culinary Tourism Attractiveness**

##### **Recommendation 1: Include American tourists in Poland tourism promotional strategies**

Americans are not included in Poland's Tourism Strategy as a target market for visiting Poland, however according to this research, a significant portion of Americans have expressed interest in visiting Poland for the culinary offerings and that it would either be a primary purpose for their visit, or a secondary purpose. American's make up a significant portion of the survey sample and have strong, positive associations or familiarity with Poland. This would serve as a potential target market for increasing foreign tourism numbers. Americans are also coming to Poland with increased military presence in the country. These military members would also benefit from Poland's culinary tourism offer and will be more likely to participate in tourism and culinary tourism activities.

##### **Recommendation 2: Include gastronomic tourism into Poland's official tourism strategy in future strategic documents**

Gastronomic tourism is proven to have a strong economic impact, improve a nation's brand image and help build positive country associations through the gastronomic product. There is a large international interest in culinary tourism activities and the market is mostly untapped in Poland. Poland's overall tourism strategy ignores food tourism as a driver or motivation for tourism in a location. Overwhelmingly the concept of visiting a place to try the food resonates in the global community and is not limited to a particular place. Research results showed that foreign visitors to Poland are very familiar with Poland, their history, their food and show a great interest in visiting Poland with the primary purpose of trying the food. Gastronomic tourism also creates memorable experiences, a strong competitive advantage, contributes to a strong brand image and benefits the county economically. There is a strong relationship between cultural tourism and culinary heritage, so a country like Poland is strategically capable of implementing gastronomic tourism into their marketing mix.

##### **Recommendation 3: Maintain Polish culinary heritage and authenticity when developing future gastronomic tourism**

Authenticity and traditional experiences were recurring themes in the data and an important indicator of satisfaction for foodies and culinary tourists of all ages and country of origin. This concept of authenticity can be additionally described as a "framework of the tourism sector, (that) refers to the offer of situations, places, natural attractions, objects and people who are not only genuine and original but have not been changed or staged for visitors – that is, they exist irrespective of the presence of tourists" (UNWTO, 2019, p. 33).



Development of tourism that occurs too quickly could result in a loss of authenticity or creating a gastronomic tourism product that caters toward the tourists and loses its value of cultural heritage. It is important to develop tourism carefully. These food offerings have a strong correlation with other aspects of cultural tourism, and both can benefit each other in a positive way in terms of image and attractiveness of the tourism offer.

#### **Recommendation 4: Take advantage of Pierogi and Kielbasa as flagship culinary tourism products**

There is an overwhelming interest and familiarity with Pierogi and Kielbasa in potential foreign tourists, along with positive associations of these foods being “comfort food” and “My favorite food” and “Delicious”. Research showed that both Pierogi and Kielbasa were both very interesting and that people wanted to try them, and survey respondents also displayed strong familiarity with both products, much more so than any other food offerings. Every great culture around the world has some sort of dumpling offer, including the Ravioli in Italy, Gyoza in Japan and Poland has arguably one of the strongest dumpling brands in the world.

Kielbasa and Pierogi have the ability to contribute positively to Poland’s nation brand and increase Poland’s image as a unique, valuable destination. These products are “unique”, “traditional”, “authentic” and can represent a group of culinary products that will differentiate Poland from other tourism destinations in the European Union.

Pierogi and Kielbasa are special and different and can be utilized as a tourism product to promote other traditional culinary heritage in Poland’s culinary mix. Both of these products share a high degree of familiarity amongst foreign tourists and a high degree of attractiveness. Many respondents noted familiarity with Pierogi and Kielbasa. These food offerings are considered as highly attractive, well-known and great association with the ‘Poland’ Nation Brand. It is suggested that future marketing and promotional activities by the Polish Tourism Organization utilize this knowledge to capitalize on these flagship products and use the positive association with these food products to add to Poland’s brand image.

#### **Recommendation 5: Unique gastronomic Polish offer would easily give competitive advantage for Poland as a destination**

Poland has a unique cultural and gastronomic heritage that has large amount of familiarity with the international community and research indicates a great interest in trying and eating these dishes. Poland’s branded foods and protected heritage serve as a great source of differentiation from other European tourism destinations. Poland has famous vodka offerings that are protected heritage, a quickly developing Food Truck and Street Food Scene, a rich history connected to the food and a wide variety of culinary tourism products that are available to offer to both the international and domestic tourist.

There are several ways that Poland can increase its competitiveness in the gastronomic tourism sector that include increasing the availability of experience-based tourism experiences, promote their wide array of protected products (PDOS, PGIS), and create new experiences that allow customers to engage in Poland's unique culinary heritage. Poland should create projects that boost the value of gastronomic heritage, develop a greater awareness in foreign tourists of the culinary offer that Poland has and promote the recognition and development of local gastronomy.

### **Recommendation 6: Create culinary tourism strategy on a national level**

The research suggests that culinary tourism makes Poland's tourism offer more attractive and boosts the value of Poland's tourism brand. It is suggested that Poland create an umbrella organization that focuses on culinary/gastronomic tourism specifically and is meant to market and promote Polish culinary tourism products and experiences. As of now, Poland has many valuable organizations working at the regional, local and product levels, but no national strategy and the strategy lacks focus on international tourism. It is indicated in Poland's current tourism strategy that there is a strong focus on increasing domestic tourism and increasing visitation to rural areas where further development of agritourism can help solve this issue. A national strategy and management of Poland's brand using gastronomy would be beneficial to increase visitation of age groups that will spend more on the culinary tourism product.

### **Recommendation 7: Focus marketing efforts on the 25-55 age demographic**

Results concluded that the specified age group between 25 years of age and 55 years of age had the highest rates of wanting to visit Poland for the primary purpose of food and for a secondary purpose. Together, this age range reflects a demographic that is overwhelmingly interested in experiencing Poland for their food offerings. Polish Tourism authorities state that this group contains the largest number of foreign tourist arrivals into Poland; thus, this group will likely spend at least 35% of their travel budget on food. This age group represents the largest number of arrivals and interest in visiting Poland for food. Increased visitation by this group will result in a greater economic benefit for Poland. It is highly suggested that Poland direct marketing efforts toward international visitor groups within this age range. Poland's gastronomic tourism offering is very attractive for foodies and people who seek to experience a destination through its culture. All age ranges will take advantage of culinary tourism as a secondary purpose of visiting, but 18-55 range shows the greatest potential for marketing efforts as these groups travel for a primary purpose as well.

### **Recommendation 8: Offer memorable culinary tourism experiences**

A significant number of respondents in the data expressed that experiencing gastronomy in a destination creates a memorable and unforgettable trip that encourages repeat visitations. The majority of respondents agreed that they remember food experiences long after their trip

has concluded. During the creation of Gastronomic tourism proposals in Poland, it is important that these proposed gastronomic tourism activities are creative, original, and create strong feelings and emotions to ensure a memorable experience. These activities must also maintain cultural authenticity to continue to be valued by the modern gastronomic tourist. Memorable experiences will also help Poland to maintain and further develop its brand domestically and internationally.

**Recommendation 9: Develop digital marketing strategy campaigns, optimize website to ease the access for researching food offerings**

According to research, respondents answered overwhelmingly that they research food offerings before they arrive in a new city, place or country. Over 26% of respondents “strongly agree”, 28.8% “agree”, and 24% “somewhat agree” that they engage in destination research related to the food offered, before they even go to a place. Nearly 80% of people believe that food experiences are important enough to spend time doing prior research, because they believe that food experiences are an important part of their trip. If people are actively researching, then it is important to expand awareness for Poland’s food offerings and culinary tourism experiences online and through online promotional campaigns.

When researching “Poland food”, “Polish food” or similar keywords on a Google search, Poland’s tourism organization official websites do not appear organically at the top of the search results. If there are so many people researching options of ‘what’ to eat and where to eat, it would be a low cost and viable option to update the Polish Tourism Organization website content frequently in order to boost attractiveness to Google and increase organic rankings.

Further research can and should be done to determine if researching food before visiting a destination is correlated to being a foodie and how strong that relationship is.

**Recommendation 10: Promote Wine, Beer and Tourism related to other alcoholic beverages**

Respondents in the research indicate that there is great popularity surrounding Wine and Beer products. An honorable mention in the survey includes “Cider”, where several respondents showed that they enjoy these alcoholic beverages. Poland can fully utilize their vodka, but also promote other forms of tourism that can give greater depth to their culinary tourism offering. Poland has a strong and growing wine industry that is currently under-utilized. This thesis does not mention Cider, but the Polish apple industry is very large and the apples produced are very high-quality and the Cider industry is also very robust. 65% of all respondents marked that they enjoy drinking wine. This is a great opportunity for Poland to promote their Wine products by incorporating it into their overall tourism strategy while simultaneously promoting agritourism in rural areas.

## 5. Conclusions

Poland is a unique destination that is rich with cultural heritage, culinary heritage and offers an attractive variety of gastronomic tourism offerings. Tourists can visit Poland and have an authentic, meaningful and memorable experience that will encourage them to participate in return visits to the country. Culinary tourism is heavily underutilized in the Polish Tourism Strategy. Polish tourism organizations at the local and regional levels are taking advantage of this growing and increasingly more attractive tourism niche, but strategy is lacking on a national level. Gastronomic tourism can become a catalyst that boosts and makes the Polish tourism experience more memorable and drastically increase positive associations with Poland as a brand. Adoption of gastronomy into the tourism mix can enhance the quality and variety of Poland's tourism offering and can add an additional venue for foreign tourists to experience Poland's rich cultural heritage and history. that Poland can use culinary tourism and its diversity of culinary heritage to increase visitation in future years. Poland has many food offerings and products that are familiar to many people. Several flagship products can represent Poland's brand that include Pierogi, Kielbasa and Vodka. They are perceived as typical Polish food offer, that could also be an introduction to vast majority of other Polish authentic, tasty culinary achievements and rich gastronomic heritage. This kind of content should be included to tourism strategy on national level, to increase competitive advantage of Poland as tourist destination. According to research results, it would be even better to develop a culinary tourism strategy that would present content to people on the 25-55 age, with a promise of offering memorable culinary tourism experiences presented in attractive digital form. Special emphasize should be given to promotion of Wine, Beer and other alcoholic beverages. Intentional tourist know that tourist form from Spain, Italy, France or Czechia, but Polish growing wine market, very attractive craft beer market or mature spirits market could be an interesting surprise for demanding culinary tourists.

As referred to research limitation, the population sample was limited to 123 responses. A larger amount of survey responses would increase the reliability and provide greater insight into the topic. Moreover, this study does not take into account the potential and very serious negative effects of tourism on a specific destination. The research was carried out before the war in Ukraine. Polish help for Ukrainians has changed a worldwide perception of Poland rapidly. It is highly recommended to do a research on the same topic after so many Ukrainians, but also volunteers visited Poland since the beginning of war.

Gastronomy can be a primary motivation to visit Poland and attract a new kind of tourist that respects culinary heritage and intentionally seeks out culinary tourism experiences that connect them to the local culture. Poland's culinary tourism products display a vast array of different and unique experiences that allow Poland to differentiate itself from other European tourism destinations based on food tourism. Future trends indicate that food will continue to be

a vital factor in tourist motivations to decide on a destination to visit. According to the UNWTO (2019, p. 32) Memorable experiences must meet certain requirements that include, “socialization or interaction with the environment, promote a high potential for learning, theme-based, offer enjoyment, relaxation or evasion, provoke venting of emotions, integrate resources from the territory, and include tangible elements or souvenirs that the customer can take home”.

Poland may adopt culinary tourism into their overall tourism strategy and framework. The strategy must include building memorable experiences, preserving cultural heritage while developing the segment, developing online marketing for food tourism (Education, awareness, promotion) and taking advantage of Poland’s “flagship” products to build the brand.

## References

1. Agyeman, J. (2017). *Food Trucks, Cultural Identity, and Social Justice: From Loncheras to Lobsta Love*. MIT Press.
2. Ciechomski, W., Romanowski, R. (Ed.) (2013). *Marketing terytorialny oparty na wiedzy*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu.
3. Dinnie, K. (2022). *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice*. Routledge.
4. Ellis, A., Park, E., Kim, S., Yeoman, I. (2018). What is food tourism? *Tourism Management, vol. 68*, 250-263. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2018.03.025
5. Iwan, B., Iwan, K. (2014). Current Trends in Culinary Tourism. *ZN Wyższej Szkoły Turystyki I Rekreacji*.
6. Long, L., M. (2004). *Culinary tourism: A folkloristic perspective on eating and otherness*. In: L.M. Long (Ed.), *Culinary Tourism*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
7. Nwokorie, E.C. (2015). Food Tourism in Local Economic Development and National Branding in Nigeria. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, Vol. 5, No. 1*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2770711
8. OECD (2018). Poland. In: *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2018*. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/tour-2018-33-en>
9. Romanowski, R. (2013a). Relacyjne przesłanki tworzenia megaprojektu terytorialnego. In: W. Ciechomski, R. Romanowski (Ed.), *Marketing terytorialny oparty na wiedzy*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu.
10. Romanowski, R. (2013b). Znaczenie etnocentryzmu konsumenckiego w tworzeniu gospodarczego kapitału społecznego w Polsce. *Handel Wewnętrzny, 1(3)*, 67-72.
11. Testa, R., Galati, A., Schifani, G., Trapani, A.M., Migliore, G. (2019). Culinary Tourism Experiences in Agri-Tourism Destinations and Sustainable Consumption—Understanding Italian Tourists’ Motivations. *Sustainability, 11(17)*, 4588. doi:10.3390/su11174588

12. Williams, H.A., Williams, Jr R.L., Omar, M. (2014). Gastro-tourism as destination branding in emerging markets. *J. Leisure and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp.1-18.
13. World Food Travel Association (2020). *What is Food Tourism*. Retrieved from: <https://worldfoodtravel.org/what-is-food-tourism-definition-food-tourism/>, June 26, 2020.
14. World Tourism Organization and Basque Culinary Center (2019). *Guidelines for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism*. Madrid: UNWTO, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420957>