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Stone, MJ, Migacz, S and Sthapit, E  (2021) Connections Between Culinary Tourism Experiences and Memory. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 46 (4). pp. 797-807. ISSN 1096-3480

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348021994171>

**Publisher:** SAGE Publications

**Version:** Accepted Version

**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/629520/>

**Additional Information:** This is an Author Accepted Manuscript of an article published in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* by SAGE.

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# CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CULINARY TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND MEMORY

Matthew J. Stone 

California State University, Chico

Steven Migacz

Roosevelt University

Erose Sthapit 

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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*Tourism researchers have identified many factors leading to memorable food tourism (culinary tourism) experiences. This research proposes reasons why food experiences while traveling are especially memorable and proposes avenues for future research on food and memory. The act of travel in addition to the act of eating/drinking and individual attitudes and emotions likely work together to create memories. Travelers agreed with many reasons why food travel experiences are connected with memory. These include sensory connections, emotional connections, social and interpersonal connections, novelty and experimental connections, focus and attention, and reflective connections. These connections may also relate to pretrip expectations. Travelers who identified themselves as motivated to travel for food and drink felt more strongly than other travelers about the reasons that food and drink travel experiences were connected with memory. Suggestions are included for researchers to advance understanding of memorable food tourism experiences.*

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**KEYWORDS:** *culinary tourism; tourism; food tourism; memorable tourism experiences; memory; gastronomic tourism*

## INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tourism researchers have proposed specific attributes of a memorable tourism experience (MTE). Recently, attempts to identify facets of MTE have extended to culinary tourism (also called food tourism or gastronomic tourism): findings largely suggest that food experiences while traveling are more memorable than those experienced at home. While researchers have identified *what*

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**Authors' Note:** This work was supported by the World Food Travel Association.

factors (from the food to the setting) contribute to memory, they have yet to determine *why* this is so. Drawing from past research, this article advances critical observations regarding why food experiences while traveling may be especially memorable. It is hoped that this line of inquiry will advance tourism research beyond simply identifying the attributes of a phenomenon to a more comprehensive explanation.

Memory is important to destinations because it is “perhaps the single most important source of information” in deciding to revisit destinations (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006, p. 360). Positive memories of enjoying local foods also enhance tourists’ place attachment (Tsai, 2016), and some elements of MTE can affect tourists’ subjective well-being (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Therefore, a fuller understanding of the psychological processes underlying memory formation in tourism is not just theoretically relevant but also beneficial to the industry, as MTEs may be crucial to destination competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

### **Memorable Tourism Experiences: Travel Experiences Lead to Memory**

From a social science perspective, Tung and Ritchie (2011) explored MTE, finding that elements before (expectations), during, and after a trip (recollection) led to memories. Subsequent researchers have primarily focused on examining trip attributes believed to lead to positive memories (see Table 1).

### **Memorable Food Tourism Experiences (MFTEs): Travel Experiences + Food Lead to Memory**

Food tourism researchers have advanced the study of MTE by extending it to MFTEs, proposing that many elements of food tourism are different from MTE (see Table 1). These elements are usually specific to a dining or drinking occasion and include location, food, companions, and other elements (e.g., novelty). Food consumption emotions (comfort, annoyance, stimulation, and sentimentality) may also influence visitor’s memories of culinary experiences (Sthapit et al., 2017), connecting attributes which may be more common in food experiences (e.g., senses, sharing) to memory.

It is notable that both food *and* travel interact in these scenarios. Food alone is not always enough to establish a memorable experience. When remembering specific meals, Sutton (2001, p. 107) suggested that “ordinary meals are non-events.” This indicates that dining is more memorable if it occurs outside the usual environment. Novelty seems to be elevated while traveling in a way it would not at home. Trying lobster for the first time at a restaurant near one’s home would likely not result in the same strong memory as it would for someone while traveling. Likewise, companions may contribute to a memorable dining experience while traveling more than dining together at home. Another possible

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Elements Contributing to Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) and**  
**Memorable Food Tourism Experiences**

Memorable Tourism Experiences		
Tung and Ritchie (2011)	Aspects of tourism experiences that enable them to be particularly memorable	Affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection
J.-H. Kim et al. (2010)	Factors that capture MTE	Hedonism, involvement, novelty, local culture, refreshment, knowledge, and meaningfulness
J.-H. Kim (2014)	Destination attributes leading to MTE	Infrastructures, accessibility, local culture/history, physiography, activities and events, environment management, quality of services, hospitality, place attachment, and superstructures
Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015)	Experiential dimensions of MTE	Authentic local experiences, self-beneficial experiences, novel experiences, significant travel experiences, serendipitous and surprising experiences, local hospitality, social interactions with people, professional local guides and tour operators, fulfilment of personal travel interests, and affective emotions
Chandralal et al. (2015)	Experiential themes of positive MTE	Local people, life, and culture; personally significant experiences; shared experiences; perceived novelty; perceived serendipity; professional guides and tour operator services; affective emotions associated with memorable experiences
Memorable Food Tourism Experiences		
Sthapit (2017)	Components of tourists' memorable food experiences	Authenticity, novelty, togetherness, and social interaction; hospitality; servicescape; food souvenirs; local specialties and food attributes (taste)
Stone et al. (2018)	Elements of memorable food/drink experiences	Food/drink; location/setting; companions; occasion; touristic elements (e.g., novelty, surprise)
Williams et al. (2019)	Themes contributing to memorable gastro-tourism experiences	Travel status (deliberate or incidental); travel stages when the most memorable experiences occur; five attributes of the experience, including foodie risk-taking, cocreated relationships, authenticity, sociability, and emotions

explanation is that food experiences involve more senses than other travel activities. Even a mundane activity, like dining, was made memorable by the travel environment.

### **Individual Attitudes Toward Memory: Travel Experiences + Food + Attitudes/Emotions Lead to Memory**

While food experiences while traveling may lead to memory, there is no evidence to suggest that these connections are universal. MFTEs may be affected by authenticity and cultural contrast (Antón et al., 2019), so the individual traveler's home culture may also play a role. Moods and emotions may also play a role, as Sthapit (2017) linked food consumption emotions to visitors' memories.

Memory may also depend on expectations and the pretrip process (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Williams et al. (2019) considered differences in memory when experiences were deliberately planned (rather than incidental), finding a link between expectations and memory. Travelers on the same trip may recall different experiences in different ways (or forget them altogether). Those who go searching for memories may find them in ways that others would not.

### **Further Suggestions About Culinary Tourism and Memory**

Tourism researchers have identified a phenomenon and begun to define its attributes. In particular, researchers have identified components of the food experience while traveling which make it memorable. However, determining *why* these experiences are memorable has rarely been explored. The closest research is Tung and Ritchie (2011), which considered mindfulness and memory formation. They determined that mood, expectations, and perceived importance of the experience led to memorable experiences, along with posttrip recollection or reflection.

This exploratory study:

1. Proposes reasons why travelers perceive food experiences while traveling to be memorable; and
2. Compares perceptions of memorability between travelers based on motivation

## **METHOD**

Data were collected in fall 2019 from a World Food Travel Association survey of food tourism behaviors and attitudes among American leisure travelers who had taken at least one overnight trip in the past year ( $N = 435$ ). Respondents were recruited using a panel research company to ensure a balanced sample. Respondents were balanced by gender (51% female), generation/age (18% Boomer, 34% Gen X, 40% Millennial, 8% Gen Z; median age 39 years) and income (median household income \$75-\$99,000). The survey included past food travel behaviors and activities, general travel behaviors (e.g., expenditures, touristic activities), decision-making behavior (e.g., information sources, mak-

ing dining decisions), and general attitudes about food tourism (including centrality of food and drink to travel and the current research question).

This investigation centers around the question: “Why do you think that food and drink experiences are so easy to remember? Food and drink experiences are memorable when traveling because . . .” These items were generated from past research on MTEs, MFTEs, and the intersection of senses and memory (e.g., Sutton, 2001).

Qualitative research has suggested that pretrip expectations relate to memory (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Williams et al., 2019). Individuals answered the question “I travel to enjoy memorable eating and drinking experiences” on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Respondents were divided into two groups based on the centrality of food tourism in their travels: (a) individuals who “travel to enjoy memorable food/drink experiences” (rated agree or strongly agree) and (b) others (neutral to strongly disagree). Then, these groups were compared with determine quantitatively if perceptions of memory may relate to expectations. Data were analyzed using SPSS 25.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article connects anthropology of food, memory, and tourism experiences with the purpose of exploring *why* food tourism experiences are particularly memorable, and leisure travelers believe there are many explanations of why food travel experiences are memorable (see Table 2). The data support many concepts as building blocks for future research, and they suggest why food experiences while traveling may be more memorable than other travel experiences.

Food experiences while traveling may be especially memorable due to the following:

*Sensory connections.* Food and drink activities engage more senses (including sight, smell, taste, and texture/feel) than other travel activities. Senses are connected strongly to memory, and Sutton (2011) even proposed that memory may be considered to be a sense. Thus, sensory connections between food and memory help explain why food tourism experiences are memorable.

*Emotional connections.* Food and drink travel experiences can provide positive emotions, like happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, and excitement (Choe & Kim, 2018; Henderson, 2009; Y. G. Kim et al., 2009). The positive emotions during travel help make experiences memorable (following Sthapit, 2017; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). When comparing food choice while traveling with food choice at home, mood and sensory appeal were the only two factors significantly more important during travel (Wang et al., 2019), which supports the sensory and emotional connections with memory.

*Social and interpersonal connections.* Food travel has been associated with building and strengthening of social bonds (Fields, 2002; Y. G. Kim et al., 2009). These interpersonal connections allow travelers to connect memories of a place, memories of food, and memories of people together. Dining and drinking also provide a social environment in which experiences can be shared more than with other travel activities.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons Why Food and Drink May be More Memorable While Traveling**

	All Leisure Travelers ( <i>N</i> = 435), <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Motivated to Travel to Enjoy Memorable Food and Drink ( <i>n</i> = 301)	Other Travelers ( <i>n</i> = 134)	Percentage of Who Agree or Strongly Agree
<i>Sensory connections</i>				
Food involves more senses (taste, smell, sight, etc.) than other travel activities	3.80 (0.86)	4.00	3.37**	66.9
<i>Emotional connections</i>				
I am in a better mood when I am traveling than when I am at home	3.73 (0.97)	3.86	3.43**	60.0
It leads to intense emotions, like awe, wonder, and excitement	3.61 (1.02)	3.78	3.22**	54.7
<i>Social and interpersonal connections</i>				
When I am on a trip, I share my food experiences with people I care about	3.73 (0.97)	3.94	3.27**	65.7
There are social aspects to food travel activities that other travel activities (such as visiting museums) do not have	3.68 (0.90)	3.83	3.36**	62.0
<i>Novelty and experimental connections</i>				
When I am on a trip, I have more "novel" experiences (trying something for the first time)	3.85 (0.87)	3.97	3.56**	71.3
Traveling exposes me to exotic or unusual food/drink experiences	3.89 (0.86)	4.09	3.46**	71.5
When I am on a trip, I can have authentic experiences that I can have nowhere else	3.94 (0.86)	4.11	3.56**	74.7
When compared with dining at home, dining while traveling is different or out-of-the-ordinary	3.90 (0.80)	4.01	3.63**	74.0
<i>Focus and attention</i>				
When I am on a trip, a "normal" activity like dining seems more special	3.91 (0.85)	4.06	3.56**	74.5
I pay more attention to the small details of experiences when I am traveling	3.87 (0.85)	4.05	3.48**	71.3
<i>Reflective connections</i>				
I am reminded of food travel experiences later in life (such as when I see certain foods or restaurants)	3.84 (0.85)	4.00	3.49**	71.7

Note: 5 = *strongly agree* to 1 = *strongly disagree*.

\*\*t-test significant at  $p < .001$ .

*Novelty and experimental connections.* Travel leads to unique experiences as travelers see and do things for the first time (Lee & Crompton, 1992). Because of the variety of possible food travel experiences, food travel may also encourage experimentation, as travelers are enticed to try new things, which they may not do at home. These experiences can also help travelers accumulate social capital (Fields, 2002; Mak et al., 2012) as they encounter experiences they would not be able to experience outside of a travel environment.

*Focus and attention.* During travel, individuals may apply more focus and attention to their activities than while in their usual environment. This may also be related to mindfulness and memory, as explored by Tung and Ritchie (2011). Sutton (2011) proposed that “food can hide powerful meanings and structures under the cloak of the mundane and the quotidian” (p. 3), and during travel individuals may be more likely to explore and focus on these meanings and memories. Common experiences that individuals frequently engage in at home (like dining out) may be more memorable while traveling. This may also explain how travel can turn “non-events” like eating into memories.

*Reflective connections.* Reflecting on experiences is a part of memory, and one explanation for why food travel experiences may be particularly memorable is that people may encounter these foods later in life. At home, travelers may see television food shows or local restaurants specializing in a cuisine they had on vacation—bringing to mind past food and drink experiences (Stone & Migacz, 2016). Mojet and Köster (2005) proposed that memory plays an important role in the formation of food expectations but that much of the knowledge about what people eat and drink is stored implicitly. This supports the suggestion that, when travelers see foods from their travels, the memories are brought to the forefront.

## **Comparing Traveler Expectations**

Those who travel for memorable food and drink experiences believe there to be a greater connection between experiences and memory ( $p < .001$  on all items) than other travelers (see Table 2). Thus, different travelers have different tendencies to attribute food experiences to memory. Williams et al. (2019) used qualitative data to propose that memory may be related to deliberate (instead of incidental) food tourism activities. This provides quantitative support for their proposition, while supporting Tung and Ritchie’s (2011) proposition that pretrip anticipation is related to memory. Thus, destinations can delineate between travelers based on the travelers’ individual importance placed on food and drink.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Application to Food Tourism Businesses and Destinations**

Quite simply, destinations and food tourism operators should not just focus on the experience itself (such as the food offered or the physical setting) but also on the connections between food tourism and memory (e.g., multiple senses,



positive emotions, social connections). For example, businesses can ensure that culinary tourism experiences promote interpersonal connections and opportunities for experimentation. Additionally food and drink souvenirs can help imbed the experience into a positive memory.

Also, it is important to understand pretrip expectations in helping destinations provide memorable experiences. For culinary travelers and those who travel for memorable food and drink experiences, the elements of MFTEs should be a focus. For other travelers, standard or usual food experiences may be sufficient for their trip satisfaction. Paying attention to these different expectations may help ensure traveler satisfaction.

### **Extending the Research**

We propose that understanding *what* makes up a memorable food or drink experience is only the first step in linking food travel and memory. It is also important to understand *why* there is a connection. We propose many research questions, while recommending that more precise measurements (such as multi-item scales) help define and investigate these concepts.

- How do memories from food experiences while traveling compare with similar experiences at home? How does the travel experience itself add to the phenomenon of memory?
- How is memory affected by different decision-making behaviors while traveling?
- Are food experiences while traveling more memorable than other travel activities, as suggested?
- Can in situ surveys measure sensory perceptions and attention to sensory stimuli (comparing usual environments with travel environments)? Longitudinal studies could also identify how these sensory memories are retained over time.
- Different environments could be considered to better understand if and how social situations impact memory (do travelers remember more with others than while alone?).
- Can in situ measurements of moods and emotions help to explain connections between emotions and memory?
- The role of expectations could be investigated by comparing pre-trip planning with post-trip perceptions to better link the expectations with outcomes. Does traveling set the mood for memory, as travelers depart and arrive seeking MTEs? How can destinations, attractions, or restaurants measure pretrip expectations to create MTEs?
- In posttrip reflection, are these experiences more memorable because the stories are retold or shared?

### **Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food and Memory**

Interdisciplinary approaches are also recommended to expand MTE and MFTE research, including anthropology and food studies. Within anthropology,

Sutton and colleagues have researched the intersection of food and memory (Sutton, 2010, 2011) and food and senses (Korsmeyer & Sutton, 2011). Within food studies, there have been decades of studies on the sensory evaluation of food (e.g., Amerine et al., 2013; Lawless & Heymann, 2010; Watts et al., 1989) which may also relate to memory. There are also intersections between food choice and psychology, such as emotional influences on food choice (e.g., Gibson, 2006), which may also be relevant to explore in a tourism context. It is hoped that this research provides a building block for better incorporating additional social science research into tourism–memory linkages.

## LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUDING SUMMARY

### Limitations


Empirical data has been presented indicating many reasons that culinary tourism may be related to memory. However advanced statistical measurements (e.g. multi-item scales) or methods (e.g. structural equation modeling) have not been utilized. Analysis has also been limited to quantitative data. There is a strong likelihood that there are additional connections between food travel and memory that will further advance this line of inquiry.

### Conclusion

Researchers have connected food travel experiences with memory, primarily focusing on *what* makes a food experience memorable, rather than *why* it may be memorable. This research proposes reasons that food travel may be especially memorable, including (a) sensory connections (as senses are connected to memory); (b) emotional connections (as food is connected with positive emotions); (c) social and interpersonal connections (as travelers interact with others); (d) novelty and experimental connections (as travelers have new experiences); (e) focus and attention (as travelers pay more attention to their activities); and (f) reflective connections (as travelers think back on their food travel experiences). Additionally, evidence is presented that those who travel for memorable food and drink experiences believe in stronger connections between food travel experiences and memory than other leisure travelers. Extending this research and connecting it with other related fields (e.g., anthropology or food studies) is recommended.

### ORCID IDs

Matthew J. Stone  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3513-1145>

Erose Sthapit  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1650-3900>

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**Matthew J. Stone** (corresponding author; e-mail: [mjstone@csuchico.edu](mailto:mjstone@csuchico.edu)) is an associate professor at the Department of Recreation, Hospitality, and Parks Management, California State University, Chico. **Steven Migacz** (e-mail: [smigacz@roosevelt.edu](mailto:smigacz@roosevelt.edu)) is an assistant professor of hospitality and tourism management at Heller College of Business, Roosevelt University, Chicago, Illinois. **Erose Sthapit** (e-mail: [erose.sthapit@haaga-helia.fi](mailto:erose.sthapit@haaga-helia.fi)) a specialist at Research Services, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland.