Authenticity of a South African dining experience: Tourists' perceptions of cuisine at Knysna Waterfront restaurants

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess tourists' perceptions on the authenticity of a South African dining experience. A total of 400 tourists responded to the survey. A mixed methods research design was followed and a systematic sampling method was used to select respondents. The empirical results show that on a 5 point Likert scale, tourists in the 45 to 54 age group recorded the highest perception score (2.88) whilst female tourists recorded the lowest perception score (1.23). The item with the lowest perception score was "menu consisted of more native dishes than foreign" (1.26), whilst the item with the highest perception score was "waiters were natives in ethnic restaurants" (4.17). The overall mean perception score was 2.54 implying that, tourists perceived their dining experience to be less authentic. The study further revealed that 76% of visitors would like to experience authentic South African cuisine and 24% do not wary about experiencing authentic South African cuisine. The study also revealed that 81% perceive the dining experience at Knysna Waterfront as just a copy of the Western countries, 16% percent noted some South African quest largely diluted by foreign standards and 3% believed it was truly a South African dining experience. Consequently, restaurants should include traditional South African dishes in their menus and, for commercial purposes a staged South African experience be created using such strategies as manipulating the music, interior décor and anything that identifies with South Africa.

Keywords: Menu, authenticity, restaurants, South African, mixed methods research design.

Introduction

Each culture has its own unique and distinct way of preparing and serving cuisine (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007). Au and Law (2002) opine that local ethnic dishes and eating habits form part of a society's culture and can be an important tourist attraction for a destination. Ali (2012) avers that the cuisine in all its diversity, often defines the character of a destination and its

people. Consequently, it is the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the local host cuisine that serves as an attraction to tourists (Jacobsen, 2000).

Local cuisine provides tourists with insight into the daily life and cultural heritage of places (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis & Cambourne, 2003). Everett and Aitchison (2008) assert that cuisine can be seen as a cultural artifact and with more exposure to different cultures comes curiosity and a desire to explore the origins of local cuisine. In this climate, destinations are able to assert their unique identity with cuisine as a symbol (Quan & Wang, 2004). Therefore, cuisine has been proven as an important means of selling the identity and culture of a destination and this combined with other cultural signs and symbols of the location make up the experience as a whole (Tikkanen, 2007).

Van Keken and Go (2006) claim that tourists travel to experience new and unique cuisine thereby creating demand for an experience that is authentic and different from their own. Tourists tend to be motivated by the gastronomic experience focusing on the quality of the cuisine, the ingenuity of the dish composition and the sense stimulation that it provides (Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010). Kim, Yuan, Goh and Antun (2009) assert that the desire to travel and taste unique andauthentic dishes is becoming one of the biggest paradigms in the tourism industry. As tourists pursue more authentic experiences, the ever-growing interest in cuisine that is not industrially produced, makes culinary tourism a very powerful travel trend (Ali, 2012).

From the preceding points, tourists provide motivation for the local culture to offer and celebrate cuisine that represents their distinct heritage (Long, 2010). According to Everett and Aitchison (2008) by promoting local cuisines and the cultures that created them, tourism markets can bolster their revenues while preserving (and in some cases, reviving) local customs and heritage, catering to the increasing demands and desires of culinary tourists. Blakey (2012) avers that by differentiating their cuisine as unique and special, globalisation almost forces localisation to happen, and in this way regions can remain, or become, competitive in the global food tourism market through providing "identity in terms of provision of the 'other' and in terms of self-reference".

The South African cuisine is well known at the international level and by virtue of being in Africa; tourists assume that the South African cuisine exhibit unique and distinctive preserved traditional characteristic associated with its history, culture and people (Mutsago, 2011). If the sentiments propelled by Cusack (2000) are true, undoubtedly in the tourists' mind, the way cuisine is prepared, the way the various ingredients are combined and served, forms an important element of the South African cultural identity.

However, there is a paucity of studies that investigate tourists' perceptions on the authenticity of an African dining experience (Mutsago, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the authenticity of a South African dining experience in Knysna. In order to achieve this goal, the article arrangement is thus: the introduction is followed by a problem statement and a theoretical background, after which an explanation of the research method followed by a discussion on the results and finally, conclusions and recommendations thereof are presented.

There are various delicious African dishes in South Africa, yet the South African restaurant industry lacks a national cuisine (Laudman, 2011). Ali (2012) avers that places that serve authentic South African dishes are very few in South Africa. Consequently, only one South African dish (pap and stew) made it to the menu books of a few restaurants in South Africa (Coetzee, 2010).

According to Kristen and Rogerson (2002), most restaurants tend to benchmark with international service standards which tend to hamper the provision of a unique South African cuisine, which could improve tourists' perceptions in South Africa. However, evidence from previous researches (Mak, Lumbers & Eves, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Seo, Phillips, Jang & Kim, 2012) reveals that there is a growing trend of the need of authenticity in tourism products and experiences. Culinary tourism has the potential to be the next big growth market as the hunger for more authentic and local experiences among tourists rise (Ali, 2012). As such, a study to determine tourists' perceptions of an authentic South African experience has been visualised. The results of the study could improve tourists' perceptions and conceptualise tourists' probability of intention to return to Knysna.

Theoretical Background

Tourism is one of the largest industries globally. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2014) reports that the tourism industry contributed 9.5% to the global economy in 2013 and expects tourists to spend more per trip and stay longer on their holidays in 2014. Despite tough global economic conditions, the South African tourism industry reached a record of 9.6 million international tourist arrivals in 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Consequently, the sector's contribution to gross domestic product in South Africa has risen gradually from 8.1% in 2007 to 10.3% in 2013 and is expected to reach 12% in 2014 (WTTC, 2014).

According to Culture Arts Tourism Hospitality Sport Sector Education Training Authority (CATHSSETA, 2014) restaurants are classified as one of the category of fields within the hospitality industry that makes up the South African Tourism Industry. It is estimated that restaurants provided for 93 000 jobs in 2013, while

the total income generated by restaurants was R1 728 million in September 2013 (SSA, 2014). It is therefore a modern day engine of economic growth (Matshediso, 2014).

The restaurant industry is regarded as one of the largest sectors of the Western economies (Mueller, Palmer, Mack & McMullan, 2003). It is the largest private sector employer in the United States of America (USA), employing nearly 13 million people and contributing four per cent to the USA GDP in 2009 (National Restaurant Association, 2010). The Australian restaurant industry also performs well. It employed roughly 242 200 people and contributed 1.3 per cent to the Australian GDP in 2007 (Restaurant & Catering Australia, 2009).

International researchers have investigated tourists' expectations and perceptions of an authentic cuisine in restaurants from various perspectives. Torres (2002) found that tourists were upset because of insufficient information concerning regional or local cuisine as well as few chances to sample those foods. Karim (2006) also established that it is well known that food plays a key role in drawing tourists to a particular destination due to its reflection of a region's culture and religion as travellers have always been in the lookout for something which is authentic and connoted that visitors can be attracted to a particular destination because of authentic and interesting food.

Yeoman (2008) noted that tourists are now searching for uniqueness within the encapsulation of individualism, which is searching out for local, fresh and good quality cuisine that reflects the authenticity of the destination and that the end of mass customisation has seen Starbucks fail in Australia as the brand is perceived as lacking in individuality and bland. However, none of the researchers investigated tourists' perceptions of an authentic cuisine from an African perspective.

Restaurant managers and management at Knysna Waterfront (hereafter referred to as restaurateurs) recognised the importance of an authentic South African cuisine on tourists' perceptions for the continued success of the waterfront and its restaurants. They approached the researchers to gain more insight about tourists' perceptions of an authentic South African cuisine.

Methodology

There are 13 restaurants at Knysna Waterfront. Eight of the 13 restaurants were included in the study. These restaurants complied with the criteria set by SSA (2014) for classification as a restaurant, namely: "enterprises involved in the sale and provision of meals and drinks, ordered from a menu, prepared on the premises for immediate consumption and with provided seating". The other food and beverage outlets could not be classified as restaurants, but as fast-food

outlets and were therefore excluded. These enterprises provided food and beverages intended for takeaway purposes and in a packaged format.

A mixed methods research design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) was followed. An exploratory discussion meeting (qualitative) was held with eight restaurateurs to explore their views on the study. The group interview was followed by the development and completion of structured questionnaires (quantitative) by tourists in restaurants at the waterfront in order to collect data for the study. The purpose and extent of the study were discussed with restaurateurs during the scheduled meeting. They were also given the opportunity to raise their views and opinions about the study. Based on the outcomes of the meeting, the research design needed to be guided by three overriding concerns. Firstly, the restaurateurs stipulated that the questions should cover the most essential components of measuring the authenticity of a dining experience. Secondly, limited questions on the demographics of the respondents had to be included. Thirdly, the restaurateurs prescribed that the data collection should not have a disruptive effect on tourists' dining experience. They required that the questionnaire should not exceed two pages in length, should be self-explanatory and easy to read.

Two standard surveys, namely the SERVQUAL (developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry in 1988) and DINESERV (developed by Stevens, Knutson & Patton in 1995) have been applied in previous restaurant research, but were deemed unsuitable for this study. The SERVQUAL questionnaire was too long and not restaurant specific (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Although the DINESERV questionnaire was restaurant specific, it was also too long (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Consequently, a self-administered questionnaire was custom-made for the study.

To measure the authenticity of tourists' perceptions the following dimensions were used: the name of the restaurant was native, restaurants served authentic native/traditional meals, welcome and farewell was in the African way, menu consisted of more native dishes than foreign, menu was written in the native language with English translations, restaurant had ethnic interior decorations, restaurant had original traditional utensils (e.g. Hands, chopsticks, wooden plates, calabash), restaurants played local music during my dining experience, waiters were natives in ethnic restaurants, service was authentic, there were also natives eating in the restaurant, there were new authentic flavours from my dining experience and overall authenticity of dining experience . The first ten descriptors were selected, since Kolar and Zabkar (2010) identified these factors as the most essential components of measuring the authenticity of a dining experience. Discussions with restaurateurs called for the inclusion of the latter three attributes on the questionnaire.

A 5-point Likert-type scale drawn from DeVellis (1991) was employed in the questionnaire to illustrate the degree of authenticity. The scale ranged from; 1-'strongly disagree', 2 - 'disagree', 3 - 'neutral', 4 - 'agree', 5 - 'strongly agree'. Several authors (Henderson, 2009; Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010) find a Likert-type scale to be a useful tool in measuring authenticity in a restaurant.

The clarity of the instructions, ease of completing the questionnaire and time taken to complete the questionnaire (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) was piloted using ten tourists in two restaurants and the questionnaire was also distributed to restaurateurs at the waterfront for their input. No changes were made to the questionnaire. The study was voluntary and verbal consent was obtained from all the restaurateurs. Restaurateurs were assured that all information collected would be treated as anonymous. It was, however, agreed that the identity of all the restaurants would only be revealed to the management of the waterfront, while each restaurateur would only be informed of the identity of his or her own restaurant.

The population of the study was regarded as all tourists in restaurants at the waterfront. A proportional stratified sampling design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) was followed to calculate the sample size. A proportional sample of 22.5% of the total seating capacity per restaurant (for lunch and dinner) enabled the researcher to obtain at least 400 completed questionnaires. This sampling method is comparable to the technique used by Kivela, Reece and Inbakaran (1999). Systematic sampling, which is a probability sampling method, was then used to select respondents by systematically moving through the sample frame and selecting every *k*th element. This method is useful in situations where the population members arrive at a certain location over time (Maree, 2005). As such, respondents were selected by systematically targeting every fourth tourist who walked into the restaurant until the sample size for a particular restaurant was reached.

Restaurants were visited for data collection during the months of November and December 2014. These months were considered to be the busiest times of the year and best suited the programmes of restaurateurs. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences which is a statistical analysis software programme (SPSS 22, 2014).

Reliability and validity

In order to ensure content and face validity (Babbie & Mouton, 2008), a literature study was undertaken and the survey instrument was scrutinised by academic and restaurant experts before the instrument was finalised. The Cronbach α coefficient method was used to investigate the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach`s α coefficient for the total index was 0.8927. A

Cronbach's α coefficient higher than seven is acceptable (Pietersen & Maree, 2007). Therefore, the high alpha value indicates good internal consistency among the items.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics can influence tourists' perceptions about their dining experience (Bowie & Buttle, 2006). As such, restaurateurs have to be familiar with the demographic characteristics of their clients in order to make effective marketing, promotional and operational decisions to increase tourists' experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2006). In view of this, Table 1 reflects the demographic composition of the respondents. The table also reflects the means and standard deviations for respondents with different demographic variables.

Table 1: Perceptions of respondents with different demographic variables

Demographic variables	n	%	Overall Perceptions	
			Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	200	50	1.23	0.61
Female	200	50	1.38	0.73
Age				
≤24	23	5.75	2.07	1.08
25-34	56	14	1.54	0.78
35-44	71	17.75	2.05	0.83
45-54	108	27	2.88	0.91
55-64	101	25.25	2.23	0.54
≥ 65	41	10.25	1.95	0.91
Education				
No schooling	11	2.75	2.35	0.63
Primary school	25	6.25	2.46	1.15
High school	57	14.25	2.06	0.71
Tertiary Diploma	121	30.25	1.68	0.83
Tertiary Degree	109	27.25	1.33	0.66
Other,	77	19.25	1.31	0.59
Nationality				
American	123	30.75	1.95	1.04
European	137	34.25	2.07	0.62
Asian	43	10.75	1.49	0.83
Carribean	16	4	1.67	0.66
Other	81	20.25	1.81	0.53
All	400	100	1.87	0.77

The study surveyed 200 males and 200 female international visitors, a ratio of 1:1 to obviate gender bias. An initial glance at the data reveals that respondents' overall mean perception scores varied between 1.23 (male tourists) and 2.88 (tourists in the 45 to 54 age group), with five being the highest possible score. Respondents in the 45 to 54 age group recorded the highest overall mean

perception score (2.88) whilst female respondents recorded the lowest overall mean perception score (1.23).

The means and standard deviations of tourists' perceptions of an authentic/inauthentic South African cuisine in the eight restaurant settings are presented in Table 2 including the various authentic attributes. Tourists' perceptions ranged from 1.26 to 4.17. The item with the lowest perception score was "menu consisted of more native dishes than foreign" (V4), which indicates that tourists strongly disagreed that the menu in restaurants consisted of more native dishes than foreign dishes. Therefore, tourists perceived more foreign dishes than native dishes in restaurants in Knysna. On the other hand, the item with the highest perception score was "waiters were natives in ethnic restaurants" (V9), which indicates that tourists agreed that waiters were natives in restaurants.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for tourists' perceptions of authenticity

	Attributes	Perceptions		t-value
		Mean	SD	
V1	The name of the restaurant was native	3.71	0.81	14.3*
V2	Restaurants served authentic native/traditional meals	1.58	1.08	8.04*
V3	Welcome and farewell was in the African way	2.49	0.59	6.38*
V4	Menu consisted of more native dishes than foreign	1.26	0.67	1.50
V5	Menu was written in the native language with English translations	1.58	0.73	9.57*
V6	Restaurant had ethnic interior decorations	2.91	0.74	8.61*
V7	Restaurant had original traditional utensils (e.g. Hands, chopsticks, wooden plates, calabash)	1.76	0.95	10.02*
V8	Restaurants played local music during my dining experience	3.29	1.04	5.55*
V9	Waiters were natives in ethnic restaurants	4.17	0.58	3.64*
V10	Service was authentic	2.03	0.69	8.31*
V11	There were also natives eating in the restaurant	3.07	0.72	13.02*
V12	There were new authentic flavours from my dining experience	2.89	0.65	7.49*
V13	Overall authenticity of dining experience	2.21	0.56	12.07
	Overall mean for 13 attributes	2.54	0.76	-

*(1)- 'strongly disagree', (2) - 'disagree', (3) - 'neutral', (4) - 'agree', (5) - 'strongly agree'; SD: Standard deviation $p<0.05$.

The overall mean score for tourist perception items was 2.54. Therefore, overall tourists disagreed that the dining experience in restaurants was authentic. The results reveal similarities to studies conducted by Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Robinson and Clifford (2011) who found that tourist perceived their dining experiences to be less authentic. The item with the lowest perception score, "menu consisted of more native dishes than foreign" was statistically significant (Sig 0.105) which require serious attention and significant attention in terms of improving authenticity in restaurants.

The study further revealed that 76% of visitors who come to Knysna, would like to experience the authentic South African cuisine and 24% do not worry about

experiencing the authentic South African cuisine. The study also revealed that 81% perceive the dining experience at Knysna Waterfront as just a copy of the Western countries, 16% percent noted some South African quest largely diluted by foreign standards and 3% believed it was truly a South African dining experience.

Tourists who are dissatisfied with a tourist experience are likely to tell someone about that experience whether good or bad and may respond differently (Susskind, 2002). They may, for instance, act as follows: quietly exit, defect or switch to another destination, continue to patronise the destination even though their experience does not meet their expectations, or never return to the same destination in future (Susskind, 2002).

Recommendations

The researcher recommends restaurants to include traditional South African dishes in their menus such as 'pap' which is maize meal porridge, or crumbly "phutu" pap. Cotzee (2010) avers that an authentic South African dish composes of papa, a stiff porridge made from maize or sorghum powder, lots of stewed meat either red meat or white meat and morogo, a vegetable mixed with bitter local species. Savouries may be used to accompany pap, such as spinaches and other green vegetables, which are flavoured with chilli.

The researcher further recommends restaurants to include "*Umngqusho"*. This comprises of "stamp" mealies which is a basically desiccated dried maize kernels, with potatoes, onions, sugar beans, butter, chillies and lemons, which are prepared by simmering them for a while. Another traditional dish called "*Mashonzha" may also be included*. This is the Mopani worm (caterpillar) that is cooked with chilli. Other popular starch dishes that may be included are the 'mukonde' of the Venda (a layered porridge that resembles crepe suzettes) or *'umngqusho'* (former State President Nelson Mandela's favourite Xhosa dish), or the *'amadumbe'* of the Zulu.

The researcher recommends restaurants to include menus consisting of animal trotters, (stewed trotters), tongue (ululimi- braised tongue), liver (isibindi- fried spicy liver), offal (curried tripe) and the animal head (nhloko) - is also boiled and stewed to make a delicious dish. The South African cuisine is heavily meat based and the local African people eat almost everything from an animal carcass (Mutsago, 2011).

The researcher further recommends restaurants to include authentic South African beer such as "*Umqomboth*i" which is made from either maize, or sorghum corn, maizeor sorghum malt, yeast and water. *"Umqombothi"* is thick and forms an integral part of social gatherings and ceremonies. Last but not the least, restaurants may also include authentic South African beer known as

"*Mageu*" which is the non-alcoholic version of "*umqhobothi*", designed to cater for those that do not consume alcoholic beverages.

Despite its managerial implications, the study has several limitations. Although the researcher took great effort to enhance the trustworthiness and the validity and reliability of the research processes, as with any study, there remained certain limitations. Obtaining permission from the restaurants was time consuming and some tourists refused to participate in this study. The view points of tourists who refused to participate in the study are lacking. In addition, the measurement of the authenticity of a dining experience was limited to 13 restaurant attributes. Even though these attributes were included in other studies and the content validity of these attributes tested, there could be other relevant restaurant attributes that are likely to measure the authenticity of a dining experience. Finally, authenticity can only be estimated through indicators and cannot be measured as clearly and precisely as profits (Vilares & Coelho, 2003).

Conclusion

The results reveal that most of the cuisine in Knysna is not authentic, and restaurants do not stage authenticity. Most of the restaurant menus resemble the joint influence of colonisation, commodisation of tourism experiences and globalisation and yet it is expected to satisfy the needs of tourists seeking an authentic South African cuisine. Consequently, the South Africaness of a restaurant or the lack of it has an impact on the perception of an international tourist.

Therefore, restaurants at Knysna Waterfront need to take advantage of their geographical location and use it as an opportunity for improvement and diversification of the tourism product package by adding cultural and traditional South African elements in the restaurants. Finally, the research supports the strategic responsible growth objectives of the Draft National Tourism Sector Strategy (RSA NDT, 2010) to deliver a world class experience to tourists.

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