

**The Management of Tourist's Alimentary Needs by the Tourism Industry.
The Parameter of Religion.**

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Abstract

Religion and culture are determinant factors in influencing food consumption. The food sector plays an important role in tourism and directly affects the satisfaction levels of tourists. Food choices made by tourists are determined, to a lesser or greater extent, by the religious parameter; consequently, food constitutes a significant factor concerning the criteria on the basis of which a destination is selected. In this respect, the tourism industry should pay the necessary attention to the aspect of the relationship between religion and alimentation.

According to the available data, this parameter has not yet been fully evaluated when planning and promoting destinations in a way effective enough to attract tourists from countries with high spending levels and distinctive alimentary habits which conform to their religion.

The present study presents the alimentary habits of tourists on the basis of their religion, explores the way by which the various tourism companies meet the specific alimentary requirements of tourists based on religion, and makes suggestions in order for the tourism industry to rationally adapt to this reality with the aim of raising tourism flows.

Keywords: alimentation, religion and tourism, Halal food, Kosher food, fast period

1. Introduction

Religion and culture are determinant factors in influencing food consumption. The term "culture" could be determined as the common set of characteristics, attitudes, and principles which help people choose their course of action (Goodenough, 1971). Culture reflects a common way of thinking, affects the way we perceive the environment as well as the way by which we adopt or adapt to changes (Schein, 1983). Culture "guides" group behavior in all dimensions of human life and indicates "socially standardized" activities of people. These social routines equally comprise alimentary habits. According to Atkins and Bowler (2001) and Logue (1991), culture significantly determines the food that humans are allowed to consume. Carmouche and Kelly (1995) hold that the factors which shape our choices of food consumption are social class, gender, culture, race and religion – which also constitutes a cultural factor. Culture is the factor that encodes food as "acceptable" and then "permissible to be consumed", as "good" or "bad". Additionally, culture determines which kind of food and which properties of food are socially accepted (Prescott et al., 2002). Thus, for instance, the

consumption of the meat of dog or cat which is accepted in South Korea (Podberscek, 2009), called *Gaegogi* as well as in other cultures of Southeastern Asia (Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam) (Bartlett & Clifton, 2003; Podberscek, 2007), it is rejected in Western societies. In these countries, the idea of consuming this kind of meat is viewed as ghastly and immoral (Podberscek, 2009: 617).

Religion always played an important role in food consumption (Khan, 1981). Most religions have concrete alimentary rules and in parallel provide clear guidelines for the way of preparing food (Halal or Kosher). For some religions (Islam, Judaism), these rules are very meticulous, regulating what, how and when a product can be consumed or when its consumption must be avoided. Blix (2001) argues that by the dawn of human civilization, the bonds between religion and alimentation were very strong. Generally speaking, as far as food is concerned, clear distinctions existed and exist between “good and bad”, “edible and non edible”, “prohibited and not prohibited” in all civilizations and religions (Kittler & Sucher, 2004: 13; Lupton, 1996: 29).

As said, in many civilizations we can observe the voluntary abstinence from some kind of food, mainly for religious reasons. Practicing this abstinence over a certain period of time is called a “fast”. Many religions permanently prohibit meat consumption or over specific periods of time. Since ancient times, fasting was imposed in many civilizations; for instance, for ancient Asian people and for the Egyptians, fasting was imperative for religious reasons. The purpose was for the believers to be prepared to participate in religious rituals, taking place in order to honor or propitiate their gods.

As an indicative example, Herodotus refers to the Egyptians who were keeping a fast not only for religious reasons in the festivities of the goddess Isis, but also for health reasons (Elder Papadopoulos, 1987: 51-57). This habit was legated to the Greeks and the Jews by the Egyptians and then, to Christians and Muslims.

In ancient Greece, fasting was rather limited and was practiced by the participants in various “mysteries”. For example, Athenians fasted only during the celebrations of “Eleusinian” and “Thesmofories” with a view to achieving catharsis/purgation and lustration (Foundation of the Hellenic World, 2012). The Lacedaemonians, on their part, commanded a general fast when they were to participate in battles of war. In Crete, the priests of Zeus had to strictly abstain from consuming meat, fish and foods coming from these animals. Generally speaking, within the framework of ancient Greece’s religious spirit, keeping a fast reflected a way of lustration and purgation, and was viewed as an experience that contributed to the discarnation of a person, making him capable to approach gods, that is to say, reaching “theosis”. Within the circles of religious and philosophical schools and organizations, such as the Orphics and Pithagoroi, many peculiar fasts were also kept.

Romans and generally people of the Italian city-states often fasted. They did so, mainly in adverse times, when citizens turned to the gods asking for help. Pompilius Numa, the legendary second king of Rome (Zoula, 2003) fasted before making sacrifices to gods. In another case, the inhabitants of Tananta, beleaguered by the Romans (282 B. C.), turned for help to the inhabitants of Rigos, who then started a ten day fast in order to propitiate the gods before setting out against the enemy. In addition, certain fasts were kept in Rome to honor the goddess Demeter and Zeus (Vatalas, 262-263).

2. Religious restrictions to the alimentation

The degree of a person’s/believer’s attachment to the requirements of a religion depends on the religion it-self, the religious dogma, the local religious community, and his/her family and social environment.

The majority of religious alimentary advice fall under two general categories: a) temporary abstinence from all or some food (fast), b) stable and distinctive alimentary habits which are differentiated from those of the rest population. Religious convictions affect our way of feeding as a part of our daily life or as a part of a religious ritual. These rules sometimes are indicative and provide loose guidelines and some other times constitute strict rules with which the believers have to comply (Moir, 2009: 76).

Thus, *Christians* don’t have strict restrictions placed to their alimentation, namely there is no prohibited food, a reality we found in Muslims or Jews, at least not all year long. There are certainly

some restrictions to the consumption of food for Christians, for instance, at certain times of the year a fast is kept, abstinence from meat on Wednesday and Friday, etc. In these cases, the degree of the prohibition or restriction is differentiated depending on the dogma (Orthodox, Romeocatholic, Protestants or Anglican Christians). The sacred books of Orthodox Christians recommend an abstinence from food for about 180-200 days per year. The believers have to abstain from consuming meat, fish, olive oil, milk and dairy products each Wednesday and Friday throughout the year. In addition, there are three main periods of time per year keeping a fast: a) 40 days before Christmas, when it is prohibited to consume meat, dairy products and eggs, while it is allowed to eat fish and olive oil, except from Wednesday and Friday, b) 48 days before Easter Lent, fish can only be eaten for 2 days, while it is prohibited consuming meat, dairy products and eggs. The consumption of olive oil is permitted only on weekends, and c) 15 days in the month of August (before the celebration to honor the Holy Mary). During this period, the fast follows the same rules as during Lent, except from the 6th of August, where the consumption of fish is permitted. The consumption of sea-food (shrimp, calamari, octopus, lobster, crab) is allowed throughout the year, snails, as well. Consequently, the practicing of a fast for the Orthodox Christians could be described as periodically vegetarian with a parallel consumption of fish and sea-food (Sarri et al., 2003). Symbolically for Christians, keeping a fast – for some periods of time or days – is essentially linked with temperance and abstinence, which constitute an “exercise” for the body and soul.

Muslims, in turn, follow strict rules of alimentation that are called halal (legal or permitted by God) and are based on the Islamic Sharia (Shari'ah). The Koran prohibits the consumption of pork and its derivatives, of alcohol, various kinds of jellies (which are comprised from pork grease) and of products that have emulsifiers (e.g. canned goods). In addition, many Muslims abstain from consuming frozen green vegetables with dips, especially margarines, bread and pastry prepared with dried barm/ferment as well as soft drinks with caffeine (RMIT University, 2011). All the above mentioned food is viewed as haram, that is to say, “impure”, and it is, thus, illegal and “prohibited” (El Mouelhy, 1997; In Wan & Awang, 2009). Furthermore, according to the Koran, the consumption of sarcophagus animals and sea creatures which do not have scales and fins (e.g. calamari, shrimps, lobster, etc.) is prohibited. Finally, even animals that they are permitted to eat, must be butchered and prepared with a specific ritual, referred to as the Islamic canons (Koliou, 2005: 64); during their preparation, they must also be kept away from other food. During the month of Ramadan, a clear prohibition is provided (This fast constitutes one from the five Pillars/obligations of Islam (Kerr, 2009). Muslims must abstain from all type of food, water and drinking from sunrise to sunset. Exempted from the fast of Ramadan are infants, the mentally ill, the elderly, travelers (during their trip and if they are to keep the fast later), pregnant women, women who have recently given birth, and those who have their period -they are to fast later (El-Ashi, 2011). Moreover, Muslims are obliged to consume only halal food even when traveling to foreign places (Bon & Hussain, 2010). For Muslims, keeping the fast of Ramadan is also essentially linked with abstinence, an “exercise” of the body and “discipline” (El-Zindeh, 2009: 56).

The *Jews* equally follow strict alimentation rules. It is worth noting indicatively that the word “fast” is mentioned more than 40 times in the Old and New Testament. The exact words mentioned are “tsum”, “innah nephesh”, “afflict soul or self”, i.e, practice self-denial, nesteia, nesteuein. In addition, the notion of fast is widely referred to the books of prophets and in history books (Warren, 2000). Fanatic Jews follow to the letter the dictates of their religion, while the liberals casually diverge. The feeding canons of the Jewish religion are known under the term “Kashrut”. Accordingly, food that can be consumed is called “Kosher”, that is to say, “pure/clean” or “permitted” (Masoudi, 1993: 667). Prohibited food is pork, the meat of horses, blood sport, halieutics that do not have scales and fins, while it is also prohibited to eat meat with dairy products. According to the Jewish religion, as it is the case with the Muslim religion as well, animals must be butchered with a concrete way by a person who has assumed this duty. Additionally, during specific fasts (i.e. Yom Kippur), the Jews abstain from consuming all types of food from one sunrise to the other. Finally, during its preparation, food must be kept away from any other food (Moira, 2009: 77-78).

Hinduists are in their majority vegetarians. They often use to abstain from food prepared in a way that had caused pain to animals, because something like this warms their “karma”. Even those who, in

contraversion to the canon, consume meat, they avoid pork and mainly beef, because for Hindus, the cow is a sacred entity. Besides, they consume dairy products. We have to mention here that very often there are alimentation variations depending on the area or the country of living (for example, consumption of duck and crabs could be prohibited or allowed depending on the area as well as the consumption of alcohol, onions, mushrooms, etc.).

Buddhists do not have to comply with strict alimentary restrictions, since Buddhism represents more a philosophy of life than a religion. Besides, they avoid consuming meat (mainly pork) because the Buddha is said to have had metempsychosis into various animals before taking the human form. In the West, most Buddhists prefer a vegetarian diet. Some of them, also avoid dairy products (Moirá, 2009: 78).

In at least three Asian faiths, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, *vegetarian* cuisine is a popular choice (Salter, in Parritz, 2006:165). Vegetarian alimentation in China, Hong-Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan is known as “zhāicài” (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), in Vietnam as “đồ chay”, in Japan as “shōjin ryōri” (“devotion cuisine”), in Korea as “sachal eumsik” (“temple food”) and in many other countries it holds many other names. For Jainists, a vegetarian diet is obligatory. In Hinduism and in Mahayana Buddhism, a vegetarian alimentation is proposed by some categories of these faiths (Walters & Portmess, 2001). In contrast, a vegetarian dietary is not obligatory for Jews, Christians, Muslims and Sikh.

3. Religion, alimentation and tourism

Feeding represents an important part within the chain of the tourism product. In recent years, food consumption during a trip and the stay at a destination has become an object of inquiry for many studies. These studies often demonstrate that tourists’ interest in food may play a central role in their choice of destination (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Long, 2004). According to Hall & Sharples (2003), tourist spending for food represents 1/3 of the total tourist spending. For Telfer & Wall (2000) too, food spending constitutes an important part of the total tourist spending at a destination. The choices and preferences of tourists are recognized as very important in the tourism demand and subsequently significantly affect the tourism offer, such as food import, local production, etc (Torres, 2002; Torres, 2003).

In the developed and developing countries, the interconnection of culture, religion and alimentation is even nowadays very active for large parts of the population. These influences over the consumption of food during holidays have been pinpointed and evaluated by many studies. According to Pizam and Sussmann (1995), Japanese, French and Italian tourists usually avoid consuming local food at their selected destination, searching for their national cuisine. According to research of March (1997), food consumption during holidays is deeply affected by cultural or religions factors. In particular, he found that Muslims and Indonesians require the food they consume to be Halal (March, 1997: 234), while Koreans have a strong preference for their national cuisine.

As said, many studies have demonstrated that religions, depending on the degree of their strictness, strongly affect human behavior as far as food consumption is concerned during holidays. According to Minkus and McKenna (2007, in Lada et al, 2009: 68), 70% of Muslims comply with the canons of Islam, consequently also with those that concern alimentation. Hassan and Hall (2003) studying the attitude of Muslim tourists in New Zealand found that the largest percentage (82.2%) searches for Halal food; 39.6% of them declared that they would prefer to prepare the food by themselves, since they don’t have much confidence in the locals for the proper way of preparing it. Furthermore, Ching et al. (2005 in Zailiani et al, 2011) having made a study in hotels of Malaysia, extracted the conclusion that satisfaction levels of Asian tourists and especially of Muslims heavily depend on the provision of Halal food. In addition, market research by the Cypriot Tourism Organisation, which explored the opportunities of development of the tourism markets of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait, demonstrated that tourists originating from these countries choose destinations that offer Halal products conforming to Islamic traditions (CYMAR Market Research Ltd, 2009: 5).

Moreover, Cohen and Avieli (2004: 760) confirm that Jews, even if they tend to be more flexible in the consumption of non Kosher food, are strongly concerned about hygiene issues and they explicitly refuse to consume non accepted food, such as meat of dogs, cats and of serpents.

4. The management of religious alimentary restrictions

For the above mentioned reasons, the food and hospitality industry takes many initiatives in order to manage the particularities that the religious faiths set as far as the alimentary needs of tourists are concerned.

Thus, the alimentation issue linked to the religious convictions of tourists-clients has led to the creation of new “tourism products”. As an indicative example, we refer to Halal Tourism (Battour, 2010), since the tourism market of Muslims approaches 1.57 billion people (Scott & Jafari, 2011:50). According the World Tourism Organisation, a new and extremely dynamic market seems to have emerged since the inhabitants of the Arab Gulf spend about 12 billion dollars per year on leisure tourism (SETE, 2010). In particular, according to the UNWTO and the site Cresentrating, tourism spending of Muslims in 2010 amounted to 60 billion dollars (in Bahardeen, 2011).

It is also worth noting that the searching of the phrase “Halal vacations” in the internet (as accessed in Google on 10/01/2012) gave 341,000 results; the worlds “Halal holidays” gave 5.440.000 results and the words “Halal tourism” 4.710.000 results.

Within this framework, in order to attract the interest of tourists whose daily life is intensively governed by religious requirements, tourism enterprises focus on these kinds of services and products provision in all type of their communication.

Hotels. Nowadays, many hotels promote “Halal holidays”, such as the “Les Rosiers” in the French Alps that suggests “Halal skiing holidays”. Turkish hoteliers on their part, advertise their services provision based on the triptych “Sea, Sun and Halal”. The “Turquhouse Boutique Hotel” in Constantinople advertises that the food offered is Halal, Islam rules are followed, little carpets for prayer are available as well as instructions for where the direction of Kibla is (The direction to where the believer must be turned during the prayer – Salah). In the hotel “Bera”, in Alanya, a separate swimming pool for women is available and all food is Halal. The Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in Australia, the Hilton in Glasgow and the Intercontinental Hotel in Prague offer Halal meals to Muslim tourists (Hashim et al. 2003). In addition, in Thailand and the Philippines, many hotels and restaurants offer Halal food (Bon & Hussain, 2010).

Tourism Agencies. Some tourism agencies form “special packages” on the basis of religious convictions in order to attract more clients. For Muslims who prefer to spend their holidays in an Islam-friendly environment, there are the “Islam packages holidays”. To cite an example, we can refer to the British “Crescent Tours” and “Islamic Travels”. The General Director of the Crescent Tours, Mr Enver, stresses the fact that “the Crescent Tours was established with a view of offering high quality Halal vacations”. All accommodation and services offered, fully comply with the Islamic rules. In the resorts, alcohol is not served, and facilities, such as pools, leisure places and spas are distinctive for each gender. Moreover, in all the private beaches of the resorts, the Islamic code concerning attire is respected (Sisters Magazine , 2011).

In Japan, the International Tourism Agency “Miyako International Tourist Co. Ltd” promotes “Halal friendly Japan”, highlighting the fact that the personnel is trained in Halal issues by the Japan Halal Association(JHA), knowing and respecting the particular requirements of Islam tourists as far as food, prayer and generally the fulfillment of their religious duties are concerned.

In a similar vein, tourism agencies operate and offer “special packages” for the believers of the Jewish religion – the so-called “Kosher package holidays”. These packages address personal travelers, groups of travelers as well as enterprises not only in Israel but also abroad. Searching of “Kosher holidays” online gets 4,080,000 results and “Kosher vacations” 1.150.000 results. As an indicative example, we can refer to the tourism agency “Kosher Holidays” which advertises that the hotels with which it cooperates offer Kosher food, under of the strict supervision of a rabbi. The agency also suggests Kosher cruises. To cite an example, we can refer to a seven day cruise in the Greek islands

with the ships Golden Iris and Royal Iris, where Kosher meals are served under the supervision of rabbis, whose names are mentioned in the site. The same agency offers holidays during the Jewish sacred celebrations.

Air companies. As far as air companies are concerned, they are fully adapted to the needs and exigencies of the travelers, that is to say, according to their religious convictions. Thus, they offer Halal, Kosher, Hindu or vegetarian meals for persons who follow a specific diet. Exploring the websites of 56 air companies that fly outbound (this research was made by the authors from 01/11 to 30/11/2011 for the purposes of this essay), we find that, in their majority, they serve meals corresponding to the religious needs of the travelers during the flights. A percentage of 9.52% of the air companies explicitly refers to religious meals, in particular Halal, Kosher and Hindu meals, and the rest of the companies refer to them generally as “special meals”. We note here that the categorization of meals as religious is not strict, since in some cases these meals also comprise vegetarian meals of the Hindu type (for example, Alitalia, Finnair, Philippine Airlines). The air companies of Arabic or Muslim countries do not integrate the Halal meals in the category of “religious meals” or “special meals”, since all of the meals are prepared in this way (e.g. Saudi Arabian Airlines, Qatar Airways, Etihad, etc.). Moreover, EL AL airways serves all Kosher meals, but also serves other kinds of meals which are integrated in the wide category of “special meals”. Often, the ingredients of meals are inscribed with details in the websites of the air companies, and especially the prohibited ones.

Restaurants. As far as restaurants are concerned, there are organizations that provide labels which certify food provision in accordance with the religious convictions of travelers. To cite an example, the Muslim Consumer Group (MCG) is a non-profit organization that offers training for Muslims in order to search for and recognize Halal food. The organization awards a relevant certificate. Its website is visited by Muslims in more than 90 countries and there are 500,000 visitors (Muslim Consumers Group, 2011). The website contains a table of the restaurants and chains of restaurants that operate worldwide (for example, KFC, Wendy’s, Pizza Hut, Burger King, etc.), and a distinctive coloration is used to indicate the degree of products’ correspondence to the Halal specifications.

Within this context, the national tourism organization of New Zealand took the initiative to promote the country as a tourism destination friendly to the Muslim countries of the Middle East (Wan Hassan and Hall, 2003; Wan Hassan and Awang, 2009). Thus, in many restaurants of New Zealand, Halal food for Muslims is served, which is promoted in the tourism campaign of the country. In order to attract a larger segment of the Muslim market, the national tourism organization of Thailand proceeded to the establishment of a special agency for the certification of Halal food. This agency grants the respective certificates to the restaurants that offer food which meet the requirements of Muslim tourists.

Similar is also the course of action of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (UOJCA) - Orthodox Union (OU), which is one of the oldest Jewish organizations in the US. The Union supervises and certifies enterprises that provide Kosher food. According to the available data, in 2010 the Union supervised more than 400,000 food products in 8,000 factories in 80 different countries.

4. Conclusion

Religion plays an important role in the alimentary and tourism choices. Its role is increasingly recognized by agents of international tourism. It is indicative that the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, adopted by the UNWTO, makes a particular reference to the obligations of the tourism industry in order to boost tourism. According to the code, the professionals of the tourism sector have to contribute to the cultural and spiritual fulfillment of tourists, providing them with the possibility to carry out their religious duties during their trip (Moira, 2009: 134).

The food sector plays a significant role in tourism and directly affects tourist satisfaction. Food choices of tourists are determined, to a lesser or greater degree, by the religious parameter and subsequently food constitutes an important factor shaping the criteria on the basis of which a

destination is chosen. Consequently, it is necessary that the tourism industry give more attention to the aspect of the relationship between religion and alimentation.

According to the available data, this parameter has not yet been adequately taken into account for the programming and the promotion of destinations in order to attract tourists from countries with high tourism spending and particular alimentary exigencies which comply with their religious convictions.

Since the existing research seems incomplete, the authors suggest further exploration of the field at the national and the global level with an aim to collecting more information for the choices, desires and needs of tourists depending on their religion and the degree that it affects their travelling behavior. This consideration will lead to more rational and effective promotion of tourism destinations.

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