

## *Chapter 7*

### **Gastronomy as a key factor in branding Spain**

*by*  
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*Spain has become a name in the world of gastronomy. However, in the global all-out war for gastronomic influence, there are still many challenges for Spain including the need to: improve the gastronomic offer; globally create a brand image; increase Spanish restaurants abroad; develop the tapas concept; become a global reference point for culinary education; and provide tools for travellers to design their experiences and to connect with them (emphasising quality, authenticity, value, substance and comfort). Mass-customisation is becoming a new trend and with this new challenges are unfolding for the food tourism sector.*

## Gastronomy as a soft-power

As chef Ferrán Adrià said, “Gastronomy is the new Rock and Roll”. Gastronomy is no longer just about food and cooking, it has become the latest fashion and a widespread subject of conversation. It reaches all kinds of publics, regardless of age, gender, cultural background or country of origin. It is an intercultural and intergenerational movement that has become a global phenomenon thanks to massive media coverage.

At the same time, the tourism sector is a major contributor to the world’s economy. In 2010, there were 935 million international tourist arrivals, which generated revenues of EUR 693 billion worldwide (USD 919 billion), up from EUR 610 billion in 2009 (UNWTO, 2011).

In 2010, Spain received 52.67 million tourists, who generated nearly EUR 49 billion in revenue. Spain is the fourth most popular tourist destination if judged by international arrivals, after the United States, France and China; and the second by receipts just behind the United States (UNWTO, 2011). It has to be taken into account that tourism in Spain accounts for 10% of Spanish GDP, and employs 11.5% of the country’s working population (IET, 2010a, 2010b). The tourists that visited Spain rated their holidays 8.5 out of 10 (IET, 2010a, 2010b). That is the reason why tourists return to Spain, with many of them visiting the same destination each year.

Gastronomy is gaining ground as one of the main reason for travelling to Spain. In 2010, of 52 million holiday makers visiting Spain, 6 million stated that gastronomy and Spanish wines were the main reasons for their choice of destination (IET, 2011). According to IET (2011), this generated more than EUR 5 010 million in revenue.

If tourism factors are considered, it can be seen that the travel sector has always been closely bound to gastronomy. The food and gastronomy sector is one of the main world economic sectors. In Spain alone, the food and agriculture industry contributes 7.6% of GDP and employs 400 000 people (National Statistics Institute of Spain). In addition, food and gastronomy has the best coverage rate and is the most dynamic sector for Spain’s exports.

Spain is a country with 68 000 restaurants and almost 190 000 bars (FEHR, 2011). Food and wine are the second highest rated experiences in Spain, with visitors rating their satisfaction 8.3 out of 10. Therefore gastronomy plays a major role in the way tourists experience a destination and many travellers visit and return to the same destination to enjoy its unique gastronomy.

Like tourism, food is branded by “place” as a marker of origin and authenticity. Tourism authorities around the globe are recognising the potential of gastronomic tourism as a powerful tool to brand places, regions or entire countries. There are many examples of world-renowned products that have derived their names from their place or region of origin such as Neufchâtel and Champagne in France, or Parma and Tuscany in Italy.

A number of countries around the world are actively engaged in re-branding efforts. Examples include Korea, Chinese Taipei, India, Malaysia, Thailand and other countries. In many ways, gastronomy is a new way of increasing a country’s soft-power and brand awareness worldwide. This phenomenon is often referred to as “gastro-diplomacy”.

All predictions suggest that both tourism and food sectors are set to be two of the most dynamic in this century, due to the current tendency to reduce work hours and further a gradual increase in leisure time.

As travel is no longer a luxury but has become part of normal life for many, people are looking for different things to do. Many people are experienced travellers and have a tendency to look for new sensations. This is the main reason to create new **niche products**. The Internet has also helped to create skilled consumers who usually know more than the average travel agent about these niche products.

It is no longer enough to pitch products to a broad category, such as the family market. Tomorrow's success stories will cater to new subsets of the family niche, such as gay/lesbian parents, teens, single parents, active families, multi-generational travellers, multi-cultural families, and family gatherings. And then there are the new travel niches, from grief tourism (visiting Holocaust sites and Ground Zero), to danger tourism, slum tourism and *glamping* (glamorous camping).

As people have more stressed lifestyles and thus suffer so-called “time poverty”, they need to have easy access to information so that they can make their own travel plans (a demand of the growing levels of independent travellers). Therefore, it is necessary to create and communicate different “experiences” in easy and digestible forms.

The consumer wants to be part of the experience, to live it, touch it, feel it...; emotional messages are becoming more and more important. Consumers expect tailor-made products.

“Mass-customisation” is the trend. Therefore potential visitors have to be given all the tools to design their experience, to connect with them, with an emphasis on quality (authenticity, value, substance and comfort).

## A product and tourism portfolio

In order to look at how gastronomy has helped to build Spain's image as a country and position Spain's tourist brand, it is important to look at Spain's history. Spain can be considered the place where food globalisation starts. The discovery of America by Columbus was a huge contribution from a gastronomic perspective, as it increased the variety of products in the food market (chocolate, tomatoes, corn, avocado, vanilla). Many of the ingredients brought by Spaniards to Europe contributed to help reduce famine, e.g. potatoes. Italian gastronomy also changed significantly with the addition of tomato in their dishes.

It should be noted that Spain also took many products from Europe to the new world, such as wine, wheat, pork and lamb.

In the Modern Era, five different landmarks on which gastronomy in Spain is nowadays based can be found: the Mediterranean diet, regional diversity, the new Basque cuisine in the 1980s, the new Spanish cuisine, and tapas culture.

Spanish cuisine reflects the enormous diversity of the country. The country itself consists of 17 autonomous communities with diverse climates and topographies. Trying to summarise regional culinary differences is a very difficult issue. A gross oversimplification is that central Spain is well-known for roast meats, notably lamb and suckling pig. Andalusia specialises in fried fish and is home to the cold tomato soup called *gazpacho*. Valencia, on Spain's east coast is credited for the *paella* dish, popular all over the country and one of the best-known dishes elsewhere. Galicia, in northwest coastal Spain, is known for seafood and pork dishes.

*Tapas* culture (or *tapeo*) is the act of bar hopping in search of *tapas*. *Tapas* reflect the Spanish approach to life. And because home entertaining is unusual in Spain, *tapas* bars serve as *de facto* living rooms: places to eat, relax, meet friends, and watch a football match, have a quiet drink, and chat with the owner. *Tapas* have a long history. There are many different stories of how the *tapas* tradition started. One story is that the 13<sup>th</sup> century Castilian king Alfonso X El Sabio (the Learned) was instructed by his doctor to eat several mini-meals a day with wine, hence *tapas*. However, the most accepted theory is that *tapas* originated in Andalusia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as small saucers set over wineglasses in taverns to keep the aroma in and the flies out. Today, there are more than 1 000 varieties of *tapas* and every region has its own specialties.

*Tapas* is a Spanish concept that consists of small portions to be shared and is a very important part of the country's culture including bar hopping, *tapas*' routes and friend's gatherings. In other cultures, the concept of sharing food is also present: the Japanese taverns (*izakayas*), the Brazilian *petiscos*, the *mezze* in the Middle East or the *dim sum* in China. They all follow a ritual of sharing small food portions among friends or family. The main difference is the way it is done in Spain. Family and friends get together for a drink that is almost always accompanied by *tapas*. It is not just a way of eating; it is a way of socialising. It is a ritual that is followed by all kinds of people, regardless of age or social class.

The third of these basic points in the history-line of Spain's gastronomy is the *New Basque Cuisine*. The Basque Country was already internationally famous for its traditional cuisine when a group of new chefs decided to take a number of these dishes and renew them in imaginative ways. This movement was moulded in the mid-1970s by a series of young chefs that now are *maestros* of renowned prestige, whose creativity fall under the title of so-called "signature cuisine".

Within a few years, experts all over the world spoke about the *New Spanish Cuisine*. Spain's culinary revolution headed by master chefs like Ferrán Adriá, one of the best chefs in the world and now the Tourism Ambassador for the Spain brand campaign in Asian, American and European markets; arguably, the most influential chef in history.

Finally, the **Mediterranean diet** has been recently included among new additions to the UN list celebrating the world's "intangible cultural heritage". "The Mediterranean diet constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table, including crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and particularly, consumption of food" (UNESCO).

Gastronomy plays an important role in the new product portfolio that Turespaña is developing. This new product portfolio will guide Spain's strategic marketing plan for 2011-2014. In the portfolio, Spain's food and wine has been promoted to a higher level of importance due to the fact that gastronomy is one of the main motivations to travel to a destination. Within this category, products like Wine and Food Routes, *tapas*, *alta cocina* (*haute cuisine*), etc. are found.

Gastronomy and tourism are deeply intertwined, so private and public co-operation and co-ordination are necessary to undertake effective actions within these areas.

In public management, it is necessary to co-ordinate agricultural, world trade, education, training, external promotion and tourism policies. Permanent public and private co-ordination and communication among administrations also need to be established.

The Plan for International Promotion of Eno-gastronomic Tourism was developed thanks to a close collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Rural Affairs. The total value of the plan is EUR 9 million and was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 24 July 2009. It allowed the development of the “Tasting Spain” product as well as the organisation of the first European Congress of Tourism and Gastronomy, held in Madrid in 2010.

Spain can claim to be a tourist-friendly country, a place that is very easy to navigate. In cities such as Madrid or Barcelona, the number of bars and restaurants keep growing. There are five ways of projecting Spain’s increasing culinary influences worldwide: a good culinary offer at home; a network of good quality restaurants abroad; food and wine exports (Spain is the second top wine exporter in the world); education and training by attracting talent (Basque Culinary Centre); and by positioning its chefs, for example, in a similar category with sportspeople and artists, and using their high profile to promote the country’s image.

The new advertising campaign of Spain’s Tourism Office, “I need Spain”, highlights gastronomy as one of the key experiences. Ferrán Adriá appears as Spain’s Ambassador and other cooks of high reputation from the New Basque Cuisine, such as Andoni Luis Aduriz, Martín Berasategui and Pedro Subijana are also present. In fact, in Spain’s worldwide campaign, chefs are depicted with slogans such as “Art here is not only to be found in museums”, “18 000 bars, who needs a minibar?”, “Tapas, don’t try to say it with your mouth full” or “Pinchos, haute gastronomy in miniature”.

As part of Spain’s marketing campaign, a channel has been dedicated to gastronomy in the website *www.spain.info*. Gastronomy is considered to be an essential element of a country’s tourism offer; therefore, the information about it should be displayed on the Internet, allowing tourists to get information about the offer before, during and after the trip. Through this communication channel, tourists can find a host of information including, for example, recipes from typical dishes, gastronomy’s route information and recommendations of seasonal products.

### Creation of new gastronomic products

International gastronomic events and festivals are vital to promote a destination. Among the most important gastronomic events held in Spain are:

- **Madrid Fusión** is the world’s leading gastronomic congress and considered the world’s leading chefs’ summit. It is a global gathering that showcases gastronomy trends and innovations. It has become a gastronomic trademark that attracts quality tourism and helps to increase the good image of Spain.
- **Alimentaria Barcelona** is one of the three largest food fairs with more than 140 000 professionals. Despite the current economic situation, there was an 8% increase in visitors in 2011.
- **Salón Gourmet Madrid** is the most important event in Europe for gourmet products and celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011.
- **San Sebastián Gastronomika** is a fair open to professionals that recorded more than 10 000 visitors and 400 accredited media in 2010, 25% of which were international.

- **Basque Culinary Centre (BCC)** is set to be Spain's most important teaching and research centre for gastronomy. Basque Culinary Centre is targeting training and research, innovation and transfer of knowledge and technology in the different areas of gastronomic sciences, generating participative research processes between universities, technology centres, companies and public bodies, to develop a network capable of generating and transferring knowledge. The research and innovation centre is developing six research lines: education and eating habits; social alimentary responsibility; eating trends; innovation when managing companies in the sector; developing associated technologies; and producing, presenting and conserving food.
- **The First European Congress on Tourism and Gastronomy** took place in Madrid in 2010. The aim was to consider characteristics of gastronomic tourism in Europe and the influence of gastronomy on the creation of not only tourist products, but also on country brands that affect many different but inter-related sectors.

Furthermore, Spain is creating other gastronomic products, such as Wine Routes of Spain by ACEVIN (Spanish Association of Wine), a project launched in 2001 and aimed at developing rural areas linked to quality wine production, or Tasting Spain (Culinary Tourism Association), whose main objective is to improve and diversify Spain's international image as well as its competitiveness, develop experiences around gastronomic culture and create a gastronomic brand.

*Acevin* is an association of wine-producing towns that help create wine routes around Spain. At the moment, there are 21 routes, 16 of them are completely certified and comply with the standards demanded by the association and the Secretariat General for Tourism and Domestic Trade (Wine Routes of Spain and ACEVIN websites). Their goal is that wine becomes one of the reasons to travel. In order to create a full route and a product that can be marketed, they have to integrate chefs, wineries, hotels, tourist boards and travel agents.

**Tasting Spain** (*Saborea España*) is the first national platform to enhance tourism and gastronomy. Some of its goals are to transform tourist products into gastronomic experiences, to make greater the concept of culinary tourism by working with the idea of gastro culture and link it to destination and increase content and to give added value to the current supply.

## Benchmarking

Media and tourism agencies use Michelin, Zagat, *Restaurant Magazine* with S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants and Gault Millau as benchmarks, and these suggests that today Spain is one of the most influential countries in the gastronomic world.

According to *Restaurant Magazine*, not only the achievements of Ferrán Adrià in running the Best Restaurant in the world for five years in a row and being named the Chef of the Decade matter, but also the fact that in 2010 4 of the best restaurants in the top 8 (12 in the top 100) were Spanish. El Bulli, El Celler de Can Roca, Mugaritz and Arzak have made a great contribution to position Spain as a glamorous and innovative culinary destination.

The *Michelin Guide* and its star ratings are also an important benchmark: in Spain, there are seven restaurants with three Michelin stars, which is synonym of outstanding quality and service. San Sebastián as a territory has more Michelin stars per square metre than any other European city and more than Ireland and the United Kingdom combined. Amongst the eateries whose food quality has earned them stardom, there are the “three tenors” – Arzak, Berasategui, and Subijana, whose artistry has helped them win and retain the *Michelin Guide*’s coveted three stars.

## Challenges and new trends

Thanks to new Spanish cuisine and world renowned Spanish chefs, Spain has become a name in the world of gastronomy. However, there are still a lot of challenges including the need to:

- improve the gastronomic offer at a medium end, since this is the one sampled by the vast majority of incoming tourists;
- globally create and position a brand image of wine, food and agricultural products;
- set up a chain of Spanish restaurants where foreigners can participate not only as distribution channels but also as country image channels;
- take advantage of the *tapas* concept; and
- become a world reference in education and training, as well as an appealing place and a holder of global talent; a place where young chefs, *sommeliers* and *mâitres* around the world choose to study.

In terms of new trends, food and health will gain importance in the near future, as it will be taught at schools. New awareness of gastronomy will influence the use of seasonal products which are geographically close to each other, and promote responsible fishing or organic agriculture, etc.

Globalisation versus glocalisation is very evident. Southern Europe no longer monopolises world gastronomic leadership. New regions and countries such as Asia, the United States or Northern Europe are emerging with more power as gastronomic producers and this will be a challenge for Spain.

In relation to food promotion, conventional communication channels have lost importance in favour of new digital means. Increased consumer empowerment through blogs and social networks are important trends to note.

The creation of new wine and food experiences such as tourism in oil-producing areas, wine tourism, language-related tourism (connected with gastronomy) and mycology tourism is increasingly important.

Gastronomy and tourism have each been main drivers in human behaviour and now they are set to be key economic sectors of growing social and economic importance. However, gastronomic tourism is still in its infancy, and it is clear that there is a global all-out war for gastronomic influence.

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