



*VISITORS & DESTINATION
SUSTAINABILITY: LOCAL FOOD
AS A CORE INGREDIENT*

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INTRODUCTION- LOCAL FOOD & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The potential benefits of local food systems have been chronicled widely, and considered from environmental, social, and economic perspectives:

- Environmental benefits include lower carbon footprint and minimised energy use as a result of more sustainable production and packaging systems.
- Social benefits range from strengthening regional identity and sustaining cultural heritage to creating greater trust and connectedness between consumers and producers.
- Economic benefits are realised through the support to farmers and the local economy and supporting regional diversification and development.



Because of such benefits, buying/consuming locally is considered a manifestation of the United Nations Sustainable Development goal of *Responsible Consumption and Production Patterns (SDG 12)*.



It is, therefore, argued that local food purchase by tourists contributes to a more sustainable tourism industry through environmental, social, and economic benefits for destinations and tourism stakeholders.

To contribute to destination sustainability, this research sought to:

- Profile domestic leisure tourists' interest in local food purchase/experiences
- Work with small accommodation providers to identify ways they could influence the local food purchase behaviour of domestic leisure tourists

Findings from this research has practical implications for local tourism bodies, accommodation providers, local food producers/enterprises, and other tourism stakeholders at various destinations.



RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a multi-stage approach. In the first stage, desk research was conducted. From the studies examined in this stage, 15 initiatives were identified which could potentially influence domestic leisure tourists' purchase of local food during their travels.

Small accommodations are often a key touchpoint of the tourist journey process at a destination. For this reason, we decided to garner their expert opinion on the potential effectiveness of the proposed initiatives.

In stage 2, Interviews were conducted with small accommodation providers located in regional destinations in Australia, and following these discussions, the number of potential initiatives was reduced to 10. We also used this opportunity to identify drivers and barriers for small accommodations to implement the initiatives.

Within the final stage of the study and to identify which of the initiatives would have the greatest potential impact on purchase behaviour, an online survey was conducted with domestic leisure tourists, whose primary purpose of travel was not to experience local food. Respondents were Australian residents who had travelled domestically within the past 12 months staying at a small accommodation, such as B&B, self-catering cottage/cabin or house/apartment.

THE 'COMMITTED' TOURIST

The study identified that a segment of leisure tourists exist who consider local food experiences to be a central aspect of their domestic trips.

These 'committed' tourists made nearly *twice* as many purchases of local food during their stay than other tourists, and are *ten* times more likely to purchase local food on their next domestic trip, regardless of the destination they visit. This is great news for regional destinations, not only those whose destination brand has strong associations with local food, but also those destinations that are currently developing local food experiences as an element of their product mix.

Typical characteristics of these tourists included:

- Mainly identified as male.
- Have higher education levels (master and above).
- Involved in higher managerial, administrative or professional roles.
- Stay in B&B (as opposed to self-catering options) during domestic trips.
- Travel predominantly for holiday, and mainly with partner or family.
- Seek opportunities for deeper engagement, i.e. specialist activities such as cookery classes, food & wine pairing demonstrations, farm gate tours.
- Motivated to enhance interpersonal relationships with:
 - Family/friends: Spend/share time on holiday, use as gifts/souvenirs, take home as a reminder of holiday;
 - Community: Connect with local food enterprises and local community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Local food enterprises may focus on social aspects of local food and its capacity to strengthen relationships with friends and family, as well as local producers within their promotional material/strategies.
- Because interpersonal motivation increases the willingness of the committed tourists to share experiences, promoting review sites such as TripAdvisor is important.
- Similarly, given the desire to share knowledge and experiences with others, initiatives that facilitate the creation and sharing of content on social media platforms is crucial, for example incentivising the use of hashtags.
- Given their loyalty to the local food experience, destination planners may consider the option of a loyalty scheme which rewards users at different destinations based on their local food purchase.



LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES

The top 5 initiatives with the greatest impact on the committed tourists' purchase intentions for local food on their next trip were:

1	Provision of leaflets detailing local food enterprises in the local area.
2	Free samples of local food with accompanying card providing information on the producer.
3	Map of local area with locations and brief background of local food enterprises.
4	Information leaflet providing details of local food experiences such as farmers markets or cookery classes.
5	Provision of money-off/free gift vouchers for different local food enterprises.

These top 5 initiatives act as sources of attraction; by providing further information and/or reducing the financial risks associated with local food experiences.



WELCOME PACK



The survey considered where the message would have the greatest impact. A range of options were provided including pre-arrival, on-arrival and during the stay. Displaying the message on a **Welcome Pack** at their accommodation was found to be the most popular choice for **79%** of the committed tourists.

The wider impacts of creating a Welcome Pack

The Welcome Pack with the initiatives and message was found to have a positive effect on the buying intentions of two thirds of tourists who were not in the committed group.

In addition, **96%** of the committed tourists agreed that the Welcome Pack had the potential to increase satisfaction with their stay. These results are great news for small accommodation owners and local food stakeholders!

To further understand how to influence the local food purchase behaviour, example promotion messages were included in the survey.

It was found that the below message had the highest impact, with **82%** of committed tourists agreeing that it would increase their purchase intention:

Buying local food during your travels contributes \$\$\$ to the local community through the creation of jobs and support for local farmers.



WHAT IS THE CATCH?

Although the results have positive implications for local sustainability goals, the contribution may be restricted by the small accommodations' capacity to implement them. Barriers to implementation were evident in the interviews, including:

- Physical/operational barriers such as added workload, increased costs, and a lack of time.
- The lack of inter-firm relations and support systems.

Developing *stakeholder partnerships* in a region has the potential to support small accommodations to overcome these barriers, and highlights the important role these relationships may have in the achievement of sustainability goals.



An example of stakeholder partnership and how it can contribute to sustainability goals

Local tourism bodies/councils, in conjunction with local food enterprises, could develop destination-specific Welcome Packs for small accommodations. The partnerships will have multiple benefits for different stakeholders:



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