



FOOD ECO- CULTURE EDU

Connecting Disciplines in European Higher Academia

Module 1

CULINARY TRADITIONS & CULTURAL IDENTITY

www.foodecocultureedu.eu



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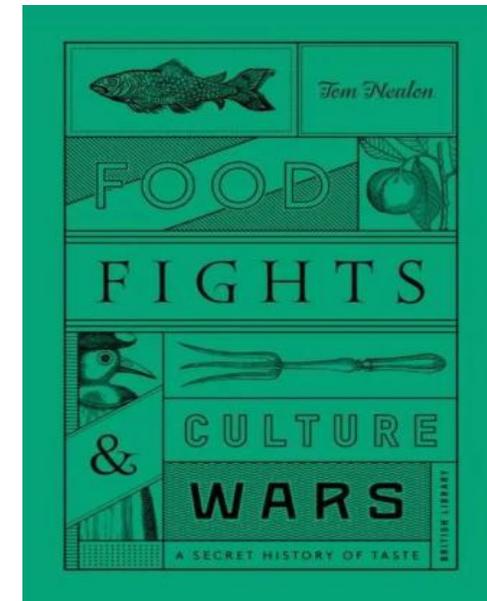
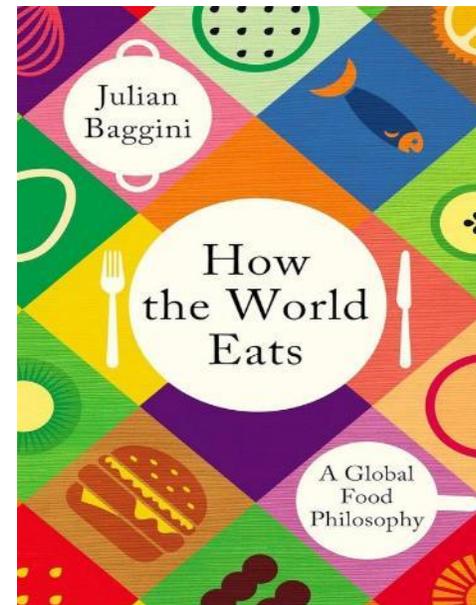
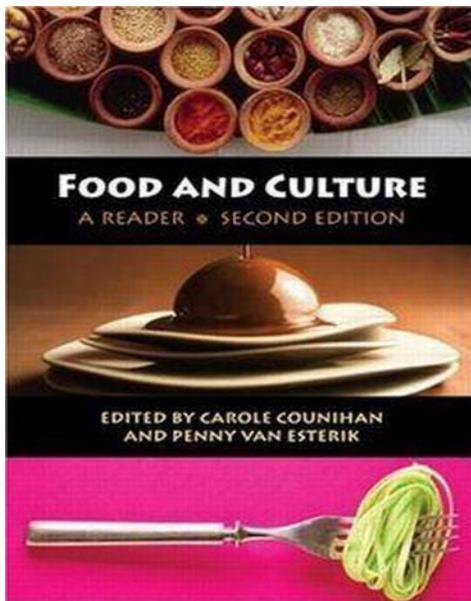
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Inspiration

Before starting the training, we refer you to a few of the many books dedicated to this topic.

We encourage you to further explore the topic of food, culture, identity, and heritage through these great titles.



01

INTRODUCTION





LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning Outcome 1

Students are able to analyse how food and culinary traditions shape and reflect cultural identities, using examples from diverse communities and historical contexts.

Learning Outcome 2

Students are able to identify the role that the production, sharing, and consumption of food plays in the (re-) production of culture, and the building of inclusive and diverse communities.



Food & Culture

Food culture is deeply intertwined with heritage and identity, acting as a powerful expression of a community's history, values, and sense of self, passed down through generations via recipes, techniques, and rituals, connecting people to their roots, fostering social bonds, and distinguishing groups, even becoming recognised by [UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage](#) (ICH)



Food & Culture

Food culture shapes personal and collective identity through:

- **family traditions**
- **national dishes**
- **religious practices and**
- **migration experiences**

while also reflecting societal changes, economic factors, and power dynamics.

02

**FOOD AS IDENTITY,
& HERITAGE**

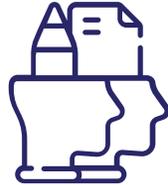


FOOD AS IDENTITY & HERITAGE



Connection to Roots

Traditional foods, flavours, and smells create powerful emotional links to ancestral homes, especially for migrants seeking comfort or connection.



Community Building

Shared meals, festivals, and cooking together strengthen social ties, build community, and transmit cultural knowledge.



National Symbols

National dishes (like poutine in Canada or borscht in Ukraine) embody a country's history, values, and pride, often used for tourism and national narratives.



Intangible Heritage

UNESCO recognises food traditions, like the Mediterranean Diet or Chinese tea culture, as vital parts of intangible heritage, alongside tangible sites.

CASE STUDY : UNESCO Intangible Heritage



Click to Read



HOW FOOD SHAPES IDENTITY & HERITAGE

- **Cultural Continuity**: Traditional recipes and preparation methods passed through generations connect individuals to their ancestors and cultural roots, especially for diaspora communities.
- **Community & Belonging**: Shared meals and specific cuisines foster social bonds, creating community hubs and reinforcing a sense of place and shared experience, notes [this article](#) and [this article](#).
- **Historical Narrative**: Foods often embody historical events, reflecting geography, migration, and resilience (e.g., soul food's origins in hardship).
- **National Symbolism**: National dishes (like poutine or fish & chips) become symbols of a country's pride, history, and collective identity, often promoted by governments, says [this article](#).
- **Individual Self-Concept**: Food choices signal allegiances to social groups and reinforce personal beliefs about selfhood and belonging.





It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others.

M.K. Fisher



Learner Exercise - Reflection



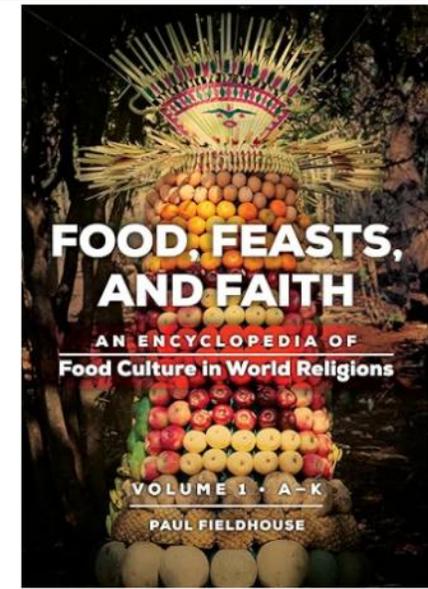
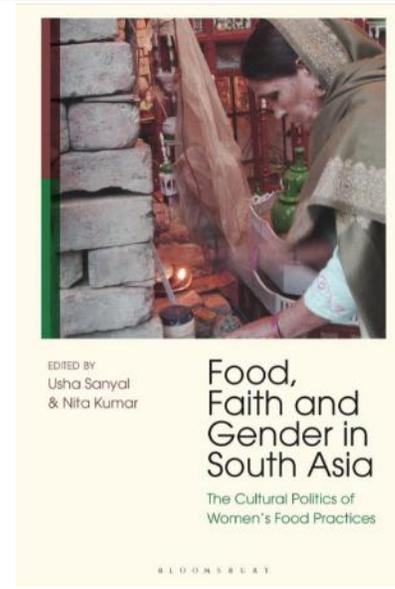
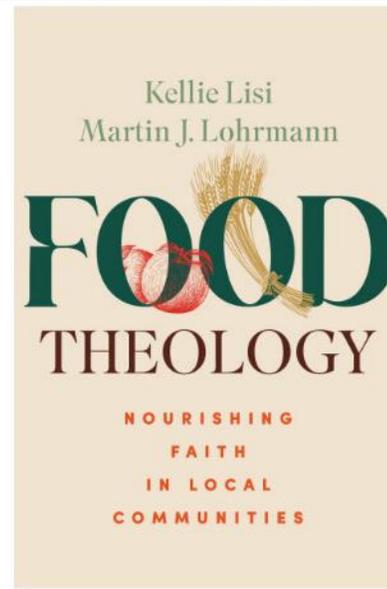
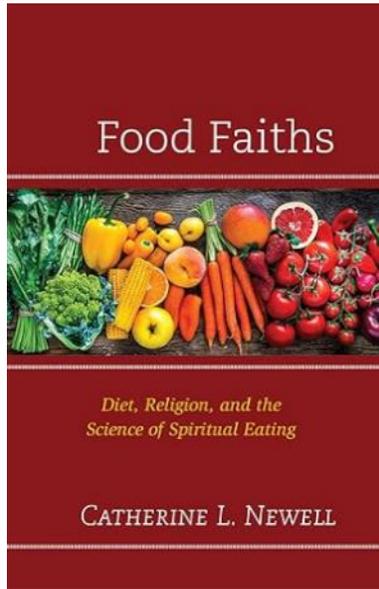
Think about a **family recipe** that has meaning for you. What makes it special? What feelings or memories does it evoke? Where does this recipe come from? Who is involved in its preparation? Have you ever shared this recipe yourself?

- Take 5 minutes to reflect. Jot down some ideas. Have you seen this recipe elsewhere or is it unique to your family? How would you describe the *meaning* of this recipe to someone outside your family?
- Turn to the person next to you and discuss your recipes together. What do the recipes have in common? How do your experiences and memories of the recipes align and differ?
- Discuss the meanings of your recipes with the larger group.

Want to learn more?

Check out one of these podcasts:





FAITH-BASED FOOD PRACTICES

Faith-based food practices involve using spiritual beliefs to guide eating, encompassing specific dietary laws (like kosher, halal, or vegetarianism in some faiths), promoting mindful eating and gratitude, observing fasts (like Ramadan or Lent), focusing on whole foods, and integrating ethical considerations like food justice, sustainability, and community sharing, viewing food as a connection to the divine or a sacred act.



FAITH-BASED FOOD PRACTICES

- **Islam (Halal):** Focuses on "Halal" (permitted) and "Haram" (forbidden) foods. Prohibits pork, alcohol, and blood. Meat must be slaughtered according to *Dhabiha* rituals.
- **Judaism (Kosher):** Governed by *Kashrut* laws. Forbids pork and shellfish. Requires the strict separation of meat and dairy products, including separate utensils for each.
- **Hinduism:** Often emphasises vegetarianism based on *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Beef is strictly forbidden as cows are sacred.
- **Buddhism:** Encourages mindful eating and compassion. Many followers are vegetarian, and some avoid "pungent" vegetables like onions and garlic, which are believed to disturb spiritual focus.
- **Christianity:** Generally, less prescriptive, though some groups like Seventh-day Adventists promote a plant-based diet. Common practices include fasting during **Lent** and avoiding meat on Fridays for Catholics



FAITH-BASED FOOD PRACTICES



Core Spiritual Pillars



Feasting & Fasting

Rituals like the Islamic month of **Ramadan**, the Jewish **Passover**, and Christian **Lent** use food (or the absence of it) to commemorate sacred events and foster self-discipline.



Gratitude & Ritual

Many traditions incorporate "saying grace" or prayers of thanks before meals to acknowledge food as a divine gift.



Hospitality & Charity

Faith groups often lead hunger relief efforts. For example, Sikhism's **Langar** (community kitchen) provides free vegetarian meals to all people, regardless of background

FAITH-BASED FOOD PRACTICES

Modern 2026 Trends: Faith & Sustainability



Ethical Stewardship

Many faiths emphasise a responsibility to care for the Earth, leading to choices like supporting sustainable agriculture and reducing food waste.



Mindful Consumption

Reducing food waste is increasingly framed as a spiritual responsibility across various religions.



Holistic Health

Modern faith-based nutrition programs, such as "Faith-Placed" health interventions, use scripture to encourage healthy living and combat chronic diseases like diabetes.

THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE



The Columbian Exchange was the massive transfer of plants, animals, diseases, technology, and ideas between the Old World (Europe, Africa, Asia) and the New World (the Americas) after Christopher Columbus's voyages starting in 1492, profoundly reshaping global biology, cultures, and histories by connecting previously separate ecosystems and populations. Key transfers included New World crops like potatoes, corn, and tomatoes to the Old World, livestock (horses, cattle) and crops (wheat, sugar)

THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE



From the New World (Americas) to the Old World

- **Staples:** Maize (corn), potatoes, cassava, sweet potatoes.
- **Vegetables & Fruits:** Tomatoes, chilli peppers, pumpkins, squash, pineapples, avocados, cacao (chocolate), vanilla.
- **Other:** Tobacco.

From the Old World (Europe, Africa, Asia) to the New World

- **Grains:** Wheat, rice, barley.
- **Fruits:** Bananas, grapes, oranges, apples, peaches, sugar cane.
- **Livestock:** Horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats.
- **Spices & Beverages:** Coffee, olives, sugar



THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE – IMPACT ON CUISINES



01

Revolutionised Diets

New World crops like potatoes and corn became vital staples, preventing famine and fueling population booms in Europe, Africa, and Asia due to their resilience and high yield.

02

Created New Flavours

Tomatoes transformed Italian cuisine, chilli peppers became essential in Asian and African cooking, and cacao formed the basis for chocolate.

03

Unified Global Food Culture

Dishes like mole poblano in Mexico exemplify the fusion, blending local ingredients with spices (like cinnamon) brought from Asia via Spanish trade routes, highlighted by the [Oxford Food Symposium](#).

COLONIALISM & FOOD CULTURES



Colonialism fundamentally reshaped food cultures by **exploiting agriculture for profit, introducing new crops, and imposing dietary norms**, leading to the displacement of indigenous foods, loss of culinary heritage, and altered food systems, with effects seen in modern food insecurity and the rise of hybrid dishes like chicken tikka masala as a cultural exchange (and power dynamic).

This ***food colonialism*** used food as a tool for control, disrupting traditional self-sufficiency and creating dependencies that continue today, prompting movements to decolonise food systems for better health, culture, and power balance.

Key Impacts of Colonialism on Food Culture

- **Economic Exploitation:** Local diverse farming shifted to monoculture plantations (e.g., sugar, cotton) for export, prioritising colonial wealth over local needs, causing soil degradation and food insecurity.
- **Cultural Erasure & Imposition:** Colonisers often viewed indigenous foods as inferior, promoting European diets as superior and leading to the devaluation and decline of traditional eating practices.
- **Introduction of New Foods:** While introducing some crops, the focus was on cash crops, but also new ingredients (like capsicum) were incorporated into colonial-era dishes, creating new culinary forms.



Key Impacts of Colonialism on Food Culture

- **Control & Power:** Destroying staple food sources (like bison for Indigenous Americans) was a tactic to control populations by undermining their food sovereignty.
- **Identity Formation:** Food became central to identity, with European diets reinforcing colonial superiority, while indigenous foods became symbols of resistance and cultural survival



LASTING LEGACIES

In essence, colonialism turned food from a culturally rich, self-sufficient system into a commodity and a mechanism of control, with profound and ongoing effects on global food culture and health

- **Hybrid Dishes:** Fusion foods like chicken tikka masala (British adaptation of Indian cuisine) emerged from these interactions, becoming national dishes but also reflecting power imbalances.
- **Food Insecurity:** Many former colonies still struggle with reliance on imported foods and disrupted local systems, a direct legacy of colonial agricultural policies.
- **"Decolonising" Food:** Contemporary movements aim to reclaim indigenous foods, restore traditional farming, and challenge the ingrained cultural hierarchies that devalue local food systems.





Food is everything we are. It's an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma.

Anthony Bourdain

03

FOOD & FAMILY



Food and Family encompasses the emotional connections, cultural traditions, and practical strategies shared by households during mealtimes.



The Impact of Shared Meals

Eating together as a family has been shown to provide several developmental and social benefits:

- **Stronger Relationships:** Regular meals together help maintain healthy relationships and a sense of belonging.
- **Better Health and Nutrition:** Family dinners at home are more likely to include essential food groups like vegetables, fruit, and proteins, often leading to better eating behaviours in children.
- **Academic and Personal Growth:** The dinner table serves as a safe space for children to express ideas, which can improve their confidence in school.
- **Tradition and Heritage:** Preparing traditional dishes together preserves cultural heritage and creates lasting memories.



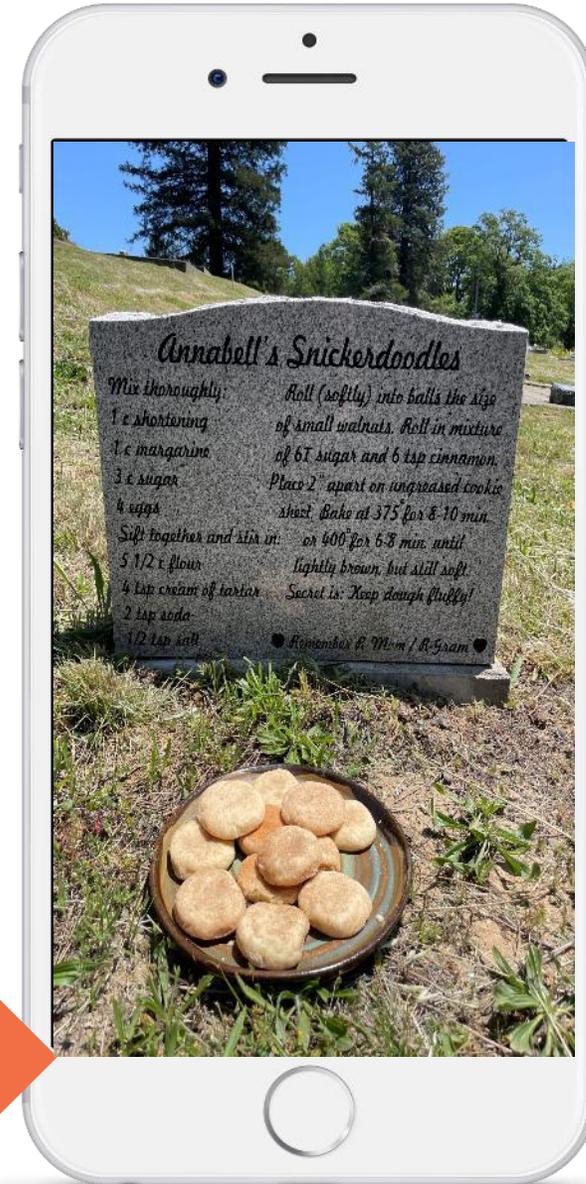
The people who give you their food give you their heart.

Cesar Chavez

CASE STUDY – CEMETERY RECIPES

Explore [@ghostlyarchive](#)
Where recipes are inscribed on tombstones.
Then search for others...
[#cemeteryexploring](#) [#bakersoftiktok](#)
[#recipegravestone](#) [#gravestonerecipe](#)
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[#cemeterytiktok](#) [#bakingrecipe](#) 🎵 [Ooh Ahh](#)
[\(My Life Be Like\) \[feat. Tobymac\] - Grits](#)

Click to Read



FOOD & INCLUSION



Food and inclusion mean making sure everyone, regardless of background, ability, or preference, has access to and feels welcome at the table through diverse, accessible, culturally appropriate, and affordable food options, addressing social equity, involving marginalised groups in food systems, and recognising food's role in identity and community building, not just sustenance. It's about equitable access, diverse representation, and empowering all voices in the food system, from production to consumption, to combat exclusion and promote well-being.

FOOD & INCLUSION – KEY ASPECTS

- **Cultural Relevance:** Offering diverse cuisines and ingredients that reflect different cultural backgrounds, like those in India or various migrant communities.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring physical spaces (restaurants, cafeterias) are accessible for people with disabilities and offering options for various dietary needs (allergies, vegan, etc.).
- **Affordability & Equity:** Addressing economic barriers so low-income individuals aren't left hungry or forced to choose unhealthy options, and involving marginalised groups in food system decisions.
- **Social Participation:** Using food as a tool for social bonding and breaking down barriers, but ensuring everyone feels comfortable and truly included, not just present.
- **Workforce Inclusion:** Creating opportunities for people facing barriers to employment (like those with disabilities or migrants) within the food sector.



FOOD & INCLUSION – WHY IT MATTERS?



- **Health & Well-being:** Inclusive food environments improve mental health and nutrition for all, especially vulnerable populations.
- **Social Cohesion:** Sharing food is a powerful way to build community and respect diversity.
- **Systemic Change:** A truly sustainable and equitable food system requires the voices and participation of everyone, particularly those often excluded from policy and practice.

FOOD CULTURES & MIGRATION

Food cultures and migration are deeply intertwined, with migrants using traditional foods to maintain **identity, build community, and resist assimilation**, while simultaneously adapting dishes to new environments, leading to hybrid cuisines and culinary evolution that enrich host countries and create new food identities, reflecting a journey of memory, adaptation, and resilience.

Food becomes a tangible link to home, a tool for cultural expression, and a bridge for intercultural understanding, shaping both migrant and host communities.



FOOD CULTURES & MIGRATION

FOOD & IDENTITY AS BELONGING

Continuity

Traditional foods connect migrants to their past, offering comfort and familiarity in disorienting environments, like specific spices or staple ingredients.

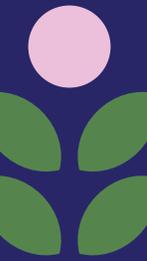


Community

Shared meals and ethnic grocery stores foster social bonds and a sense of belonging within migrant communities.

Resistance

Holding onto culinary customs can be an act of cultural resistance against assimilation, preserving distinctiveness.



FOOD CULTURES & MIGRATION

CULINARY EVOLUTION & HYBRIDISATION

Adaptation

Migrants adapt recipes to locally available ingredients, creating new dishes (e.g., Korean-Mexican fusion with kimchi carnitas).



Enrichment

Migrant-introduced foods diversify the host country's culinary landscape, seen in global cities with diverse restaurant scenes.

Generational Shifts

Children of migrants often blend parental traditions with new cultural influences, forming unique hybrid food identities.



FOOD CULTURES & MIGRATION

IMPACT ON HOST SOCIETIES

Vibrant Food Scenes

Cities gain new restaurants, food trucks, and ethnic markets, offering global flavours to everyone.

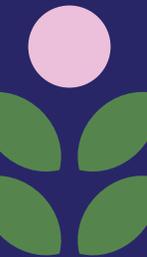


Economic Opportunities

Food businesses become venues for migrant entrepreneurship, linking communities and the wider public.

Intercultural Dialogue

Food-related projects and shared meals can bridge social divides and foster mutual understanding.



Research Article

The Unifying Role of Food for Forced Migrants' Entrepreneurial Activities and Their Settlement in London

Thi-Diem-Tu Tran & Carole Murphy 

Pages 213-233 | Published online: 21 May 2025

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/03670244.2025.2505887>



CASE STUDY – SAMEN STERK*



CLICK TO
READ

"I think it's important to consume what the earth provides. When I started doing that, I noticed that many participants didn't know much about Dutch vegetables. We took on that as a project to learn more about them together. We not only researched which vegetables are seasonal, but I also had participants Google which vegetables are good for what. Very educational."

- Jerrel Ramdat

*Together we are stronger

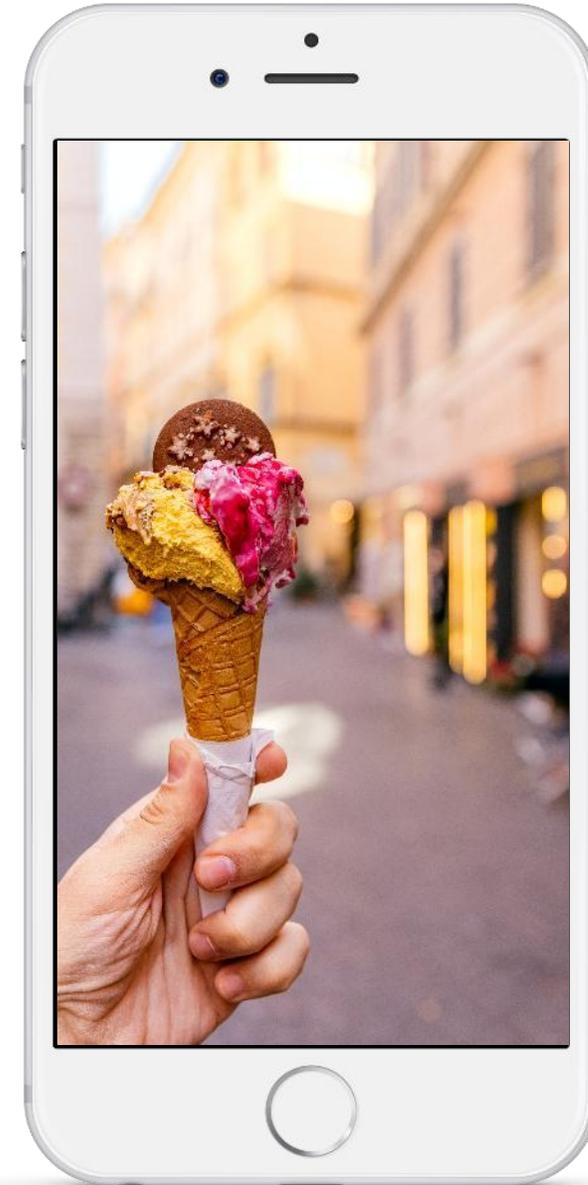
04

FOOD TOURISM



FOOD TOURISM

Food tourism, or culinary tourism, is traveling to experience a destination's authentic food and drink, focusing on local flavours, traditions, and culture through activities like food tours, cooking classes, market visits, festivals, and farm tours, aiming to connect with a place's unique identity beyond just eating, and often supporting local economies. It ranges from high-end dining to street food, emphasising the story and origin behind the cuisine, with growing interest in agricultural experiences like milking cows or picking produce.



FOOD TOURISM – KEY ASPECTS

- **Experiential:** It's about engaging with a place's culture through taste, smell, and tradition, not just consumption.
- **Authenticity:** Seeking unique, local dishes and stories, rather than just chains.
- **Diverse Activities:** Includes food markets, cooking schools, brewery tours, festivals, and farm-to-table experiences.
- **Cultural Connection:** Food becomes a vehicle for understanding history, traditions, and local life.



FOOD TOURISM – EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

- **Tastings:** Street food, local specialties (like bunny chow in Durban).
- **Tours:** Food walking tours, market tours (e.g., Tokyo's Yanaka Market).
- **Classes:** Learning to make local dishes (e.g., soba noodles in Japan).
- **Farm Visits:** Milking cows, picking fruit, seeing cheese production.
- **Festivals:** Attending local food and beverage events.

Click to Read

[BEST TRAVEL DESTINATIONS FOR FOOD LOVERS](#)



CASE STUDY : TOWNSHIP TOURISM

Township tourism, especially in South Africa, leverages local culture, history, and vibrant food scenes for authentic experiences, moving beyond poverty narratives to showcase innovation, art, and heritage, with food being a key drawthrough vibrant markets, home-cooked meals like **Seven Colours** (a colourful vegetable and chicken dish) and **Umqombothi** (traditional beer).

Click to Watch



TOWNSHIP TOURISM



- Allows residents to celebrate and share their culture – a culture that was silenced and denigrated under apartheid
- Learn about one another while sitting down and sharing a meal
- Breaking down racial barriers by bringing whites and Blacks together around the table



05

**SUMMARY &
CONCLUSION**





• SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- Food culture shapes **personal and collective identity** through family traditions, national dishes, religious practices, and migration experiences, while also reflecting societal changes, economic factors, and power dynamics
- Our relationships to, and feelings about, food stem from as far as the Columbian Exchange, and were also shaped by forces including colonialism, migration, and family relationships.
- Our **cultural identity has a close relationship with food**, structured by the forces of history, power dynamics, and the feelings of love, care and well-being associated with sharing food with those we love.

INTERESTED TO LEARN MORE?



Vivian Elebiyo-Okojie chronicles her journey of food through a profound exploratory piece that makes you think of food on a deeper level and gives an insight into what food really is.

Food is more than just a biological necessity, its love, its music, its culture and so much more.

SPEAKER BIO: Vivian Elebiyo-Okojie is a Food, Faith, and Culture Conversationalist, who uses her platform to share the art and philosophy on food, faith and culture

[There's something about food | Vivian Elebiyo-Okojie | TEDxAlief](#)

INTERESTED TO LEARN MORE?



[Food is not only culture, it's diplomacy: Leah Selim at TEDxGowanus](#)



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THANK YOU

Follow our journey



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