



## **Exploring Authenticity in Greek Food Tourism: Tourists Perceptions and Experiences.**

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## Abstract

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<p>The aim of this thesis was to explore the authenticity in Greek food tourism experiences. This thesis focused on how travellers perceive the authenticity and their experiences in the context of Greek food tourism. The author conducted qualitative research with the purpose of extracting much more information from the Food travellers, thus increasing the reliability of this thesis.</p> <p>The goal was a deeper understanding of this type of tourism (Food Tourism), the impacts that authenticity has on travellers and the contributing elements which lead to the desired authenticity.</p> <p>The approach of the study was to build a strong literature framework, collected from trustworthy sources. The research helped the author with the full understanding of the topic, it could therefore be possible to develop the appropriate interview questions that would be helpful in producing more effective outcomes.</p> <p>The literature review provided rich information on authenticity and food tourism, interesting data were given and it is an innovative research that future researchers can be assisted and proceed one step further.</p> <p>Interviews were conducted as semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. There were 7 respondents that, with their responses and helped by the author with the complete comprehension of the interview questions since the majority of them were unfamiliar with the concept, gave sufficient replies.</p> <p>Through this research the author succeeded in providing answers to all the questions concerning the authenticity of Greek food tourism and how food lovers perceive it based on their experiences.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Authenticity, Memorable experiences, Greece, Food Tourism

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## 1 Introduction

Tourism as a social force and institution is impacting the life of people and many are associated with the industry directly or indirectly (Mathur 2011). According to (Candela & Figini, 2012) the changing meaning of travel, tourism and tourist definitions, tourism is a highly complex phenomenon and can be fully understood only by adopting a multidisciplinary approach. When people choose to visit a different environment and willingly leave their home surroundings, they are considered tourists. Typically, these people will be involved in a variety of activities in the location they have visited. For instance, sports activities, excursions, and sampling traditional flavors. As a result, tourists are visitors, and anything they do while visiting a place can be considered tourism (Camilleri 2018). In 1976, the Institute of Tourism (which later became the Tourism Society) suggested that tourism is the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work. Thus, travel for any purpose, even short-term visits or excursions, is considered tourism (Camilleri 2018). In 1981, the Worldwide Network of Tourism Experts (AIEST) and the Tourism Society in Cardiff organized the International Conference on Leisure Recreation Tourism, where this expanded definition was somewhat revised: "Tourism may be defined in terms of particular activities, selected by choice, and undertaken outside the home environment. Tourism may or may not involve overnight stay away from home".

In developing countries, new types of tourism began to appear in the 1970s and early 1980s as an alternative to the "undesired" kind of travel, which was referred to as "the mass tourism," "the conventional/commercial tourism," or "the traditional tourism." (Triarchi & Karamanis 2017, 39). One of these types is Food Tourism, which according to the World Food Travel Association, is finally mainstream. A key component of the travel experience is consumption, as visitors take in not just the sights and sounds of a destination but also its flavor. Almost all visitors eat and dine out (Shenoy 2005, 1). Moreover, a destination's local cuisine is a vital component that enhances the variety of attractions and the overall tourist experience (Symons 1999). Consequently, gastronomy and regional cuisine may influence travellers' perceptions and experiences.

Nowadays, travellers are looking for authenticity in their holidays and it is one of the main elements that is taken into consideration when they are planning them. With the rise of mass tourism movements in the middle of the 1800s, the idea of authenticity in tourist experiences started to be discussed. Back in this century, the concept of a tourist has been investigated from more angles than just mass transit and encounter (Atasoy 2021, 10). When people,

places, and objects come together, it's referred to as tourism. Both industry and the larger local community act as intermediaries between people travelling to certain locations and interacting with these objects. Due to this convergence, a variety of factors and interests have been reflected in the study of the connections between authenticity and tourism. Previous works have generally focused on one of several categories or types of authenticity, such as object (or materialist/objective) authenticity, constructed (constructivist) authenticity, and experiential (often existentialist) authenticity, even though it acknowledges multiple approaches to authenticity. (Moore, Buchmann, Mansson & Fisher 2021, 2).

The aims of this thesis were to understand authenticity from the travellers' perspective and what can influence their views and perceptions. This is a very interesting area that has engaged many researchers in the past, but no one has ever presented how travellers feel about Food Tourism and authenticity. Thus, the author was motivated to work on this topic. The purpose of this thesis was twofold. Firstly, to inform readers for previous researches that have been done on tourism and authenticity and secondly through valid data collection to present something innovative from which future researchers can be benefited.

The main research question is: What is the overall perception of tourists about the authenticity of Greek Food experiences in the context of Tourism?

The sub-questions are:

**Sub-Question 1:** What are the elements that contribute to the authenticity of Greek food tourism experiences for tourists?

**Sub-Question 2:** Which factors (locals or food habits) have a greater impact on authenticity?

**Sub-Question 3:** What are the expectations of tourists regarding authenticity in food experiences in a Greek destination?

**Sub-Question 4:** How crucial is authenticity in Greek food experiences for a traveler?

The results of this thesis will concern any kind of tourist/traveler from any part of the world who visits Greece and how they are immersed into authentic experiences in the Food Tourism context in any part of Greece.

For the purposes of this thesis, general information about authenticity, experiences and food tourism is provided at the beginning to enable the reader to understand the topic and then follow the results that will be derived from it.

The methodology used was qualitative research once it is more suitable when research is based on ideas and experiences, through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as text, video or audio (Ugwu & Eze 2023, 20). In more detail, the results of the thesis

and the answers to the questions and sub-questions were given after the completion of successful interviews conducted in the center of Athens, with participants travellers from other countries, whose opinions were the ones that determined the outcome of this thesis.

The thesis consists of an introduction that gives a first overview and familiarizes the reader with the topic, giving information about the scope of the research, describing the objectives and the methodology used.

The theoretical framework of the thesis introduces key concepts about food tourism, its evolution and the most popular trends that exist worldwide today. It then presents popular tourist destinations in Greece and how it is as a tourist destination, in the context of food tourism. Furthermore, the evolution of experience economy will be analyzed, as well as the 4 reals of Food Tourism and the theoretical framework will conclude with the basic concepts of authenticity and how it is interpreted. Through this process and the concepts that will precede it, the reader will be able to understand the connection between the previous research and the findings and results that will emerge from this thesis.

After presenting the research topic to the readers, the methodology used in this thesis and the precise explanation and reasons for this selection will be described. Then, the process of implementing the thesis will be narrated. The thesis then discusses and analyses the results obtained from the data collection and finally presents them, thus answering the questions, sub-questions and aims of this thesis. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the topic and the conclusions of the study. In addition, data validity, reliability, ethical considerations and learning reflection will also be included.

## 2 Overview of Food Tourism

This chapter will discuss and analyse the overview of Food Tourism. The evolution of Food Tourism and Food Tourism trends will then be addressed. Finally, this chapter will present successful Food Tourism destinations and Greece will be presented as a destination in the context of Food Tourism.

"Tourism is a major part of the contemporary experience economy, in which food plays an important role" (Richards 2012, 14). According to Okumus, Okumus & McKercher (2007) food is an attraction and has matured into a highly sought-after niche market in its own right. The demand for food tourism is now huge and over the years it has been growing more and more. Travellers with this form of tourism (Food Tourism) combine entertainment and the most basic element of which is the dining experiences. Whether willingly or not, all travellers on their holidays more or less combine food in them, thus having a complete overview of the place they have visited. To understand the significance of Food Tourism, many destinations are now promoting themselves as centers of gastronomy and employing food and beverages as attractions (Getz, Robinson, Andersson & Vujicic 2014, 2). By doing that all are satisfied, firstly the local communities, as the financial assistance which is given to them is very crucial in every touristic season and secondly travellers as competition is enormous and standards are rising, all tourism businesses do their utmost to fully satisfy all tourists/travellers possible.

Food tourism is "the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region" (Hall & Sharples 2003, 10) and up to a third of all tourist expenditure is spent on food and drink (Torres 2002). This is a striking example that over the years, gastronomic tourism has become very popular, and even more travellers are seeking out destinations with rich food background. Food is one of the essential expressions of any culture and one of the elements of creativity in everyday life that is engaging for many tourists and by that new opportunities are providing for tourism destinations and new challenges are creating at the same time, particularly in the experience development area (Richards 2012, 14).

According to Hall & Sharples (2003) "food is one of the essential elements of the tourist experience" and there are so many different gastronomic tourism activities that can satisfy even the most demanding traveler. Experiencing a particular type of food or desiring to try the dishes of a particular chef, purchasing food and food-related products to be included in daily life or as part of souvenirs, visiting primary or secondary producers, attending food festivals and specific places to taste and/or experience the flavors of a specialized food production area, drinking local beverages (Shenoy 2005, 69) are some activities that can be integrated into a gastronomic tourism experience.

## 2.1 Food Tourism Definition

Food Tourism can be interpreted differently by each author depending on the research they do. However, one thing is certain, there will be several common elements with slight variations. Below are interpretations of Food Tourism by various authors. Food Tourism Associasson said Food Tourism "is the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place". Hall & Sharples 2003, 10 gave a more analytic definition that Food Tourism "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel". Shenoy 2005, 17 descibed Food Tourism as "The tourist's food related activities at a destination, such as dining, purchasing local food products or food pertinent products, and experiencing the characteristics of a unique food-producing region". In agreement with the other authors Getz & al 2014, 6 intoduced Food Tourism as a "travel for the specific purpose of enjoying food experiences".

Rocha & al 2019, 519 related Food Tourism "to physical experiences, motivated by the connection with the food of the touristic destination" and Nistoreaunu & al 2018, add that "Culinary Tourism refers to journeys made in certain places, regions where local cuisine, including beverages, are the main motivation for travel". It is obvious that all authors have almost the same comments and way of thinking about Food Tourism definition. Long 1998, gave her own definition and described "Culinary Tourism as the focus on food as an attraction for exploration and a destination for tourism".

A very remarkable statement of a person who belongs to the tourism industry and in particular Food Tourism industry. Wolf 2001, president of the International Culinary Tourism Association characterized Food Tourism as "The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near".

Due to the many concepts that exist for food tourism, a figure is considered necessary to understand food tourism. Figure 1 shows how 5 aspects are linked to food tourism: motivation, culture, authenticity, management and marketing and destination orientation. Sometimes this can change depending on the tourist's perspective (Ashleigh & al 2018, 257).





Figure 1. Food tourism and its aspects (Ashleigh & al. 2018)

There may be more definitions related to Food Tourism, such as: Gastronomic tourism, which is for travellers who are delighted in the culture of their chosen destination by enjoying the local cuisine, as they perceive food as a "way to experience it" (Horng & Tsai 2011). Furthermore, Gourmet tourism, travellers particularly explore a food market or dine at a particular fine dining experience (Hall & al. 2003). Additionally, the overall travel experience, which includes various culinary activities, is referred to as gastronomic tourism. Shopping for food and wine products or simply visits to local producers, wineries, cooking classes and food festivals are also included (UNTWO s.a.).

## 2.2 Evolution of Food Tourism

The movement of the human species can be tracked back to 300.000 years ago, when the only reason was survival. Over time, agriculture came into their lives and that ceased to be the case (Everett 2019, 3). Later the food was cultured adopted and according to Boniface 2003, "holy days of the agricultural year soon became enjoyed as holidays".

An overview of food-based tourism suggests that food and beverages have always been a part of the tourist experience (Nistoreaunu, Nicodim & Diaconescu 2018, 712). Nevertheless, in the mid-1900s, there were relatively few tourists visiting simply to partake in food and wine, partly because gastronomy tourism was still in its infancy and partly because of the high cost of transportation. Over the years, food tourism has become very popular, and even more travelers are seeking out destinations with rich food background. According to Mulcahy 2019, while in nineteenth century tourism generally had seen economic, social and technological improvements, gastronomic tourism did not become recognizable in the industry until the late 1990's. The reasons behind this evolution were the improvements in communications and especially the transport systems, particularly the growth of railway and airline networks (Mulcahy 2019). This

convenience made people look for fascinating and out of the ordinary experiences because of easier and more affordable travel options (Vaibhav 2023). According to Mulcahy 2019, "one of the more significant 20th century developments in gastronomic tourism is credited to Maurice-Edmond Sailland (1872-1956) who described himself as the 'Prince of Gastronomes' and used the pseudonym of Curnonsky" and gave a tremendous impetus in what we already know as food tourism. Curnonsky and others linked gastronomy and tourism, by using their gastronomic publications to capitalise on two "novelties". As quoted by Mennell, Curnonsky wrote:

"This pioneering work benefitted from two novelties: the 'democratised' motor-car and the taste for good fare which....developed in France from 1919 onwards. The motor-car allowed the French to discover the cuisine of each province, and created the breed of what I have called gastro-nomads" (Mennell 2016, 245). This was beneficial not only to car tyre companies like Michelin but also to others since gastronomic tourism became popular (Mulcahy 2019).

In 1998 a university professor, Lucy Long first gave the term 'Culinary Tourism' and Eric Wolfe in 2001 introduced the first official document on culinary tourism in which this phenomenon was explained. In more recent years, 2012 the culinary term replaced by gastronomic and in the 1<sup>st</sup> UNWTO World Forum on Food Tourism the concept of gastronomic tourism became worldwide known the term 'Food Tourist' was introduced. In 2018 Food Tourism is finally mainstream and every year the UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism is organized with tremendous success (Nesterchuk & al. 580, 2022). The table below shows the history behind the term of gastronomic tourism.

Table 1. History of gastronomic tourism terminology (Nesterchuk & al. 580, 2022)

HISTORY OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM TERMINOLOGY
1998
Lucy Long (Green University Professor) Introduced the term Culinary Tourism
2001
Eric Wolfe (Founder of the International CTA) First official document which explains this phenomenon
2012
The Term Culininary Tourism is replaced by Gastronomic Tourism
2015
1st UNWTO World Form on Food Tourism, first touch with food tourist Expand the concept of Gastronomic Tourism
2018
Gastronomic Tourism is becoming the hottest trend
2021
6th UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomic Tourism in Belgium

For a better comprehensive of Food Tourism Evolution, according to Market Data Forecast 2023, "The global Culinary Tourism Market size was worth US\$ 1.31 billion in 2022 and is

anticipated to have a value of US\$ 3.46 billion by 2028 and to reach the register CAGR of 17,82% during the forecast period 2023-2028". Nowadays, gastronomic tourism is a global trend and considering one of the most dynamically developing sectors of world tourism (Nesterchuk & al. 580, 2022).

## 2.3 Food Tourism Trends

According to Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA), 2015 "39 million leisure travelers choose a destination based on the availability of culinary activities, while another 35 million seek out culinary activities after a destination is decided upon". We can see the significance and the increasing demand for Food Tourism and how year after year more and more travellers are seeking something distinct and unique based on Food Tourism.

An impressive data point shows that half of leisure travelers (51%) travel to delight memorable eating and drinking experiences, given that in 2006 this percentage was at (40%), (OCTA), 2015. A (11%) rise in 13 years is very significant, let alone that from 2015 to 2023 this data has exploded to (95%) (Jesreyislandsholidays 2023). Every traveler consciously or unconsciously is part of Food Tourism.

With the emergence of gastronomic activities, it is therefore a reasonable expectation that various trends in Food Tourism will be developed and flourished (Akmese, Ates & Sunar 2019, 56). "As more destinations see the economic potential of their local culinary offerings and engage in infrastructure and marketing initiatives to attract food-loving tourists, the food tourism sector industry may continue to grow" (Asia Food Journal, 2023). The competitiveness is tremendous among tourist destinations, those willing to have the competitive advantage they have to enrich their tourism products by focusing on products like the modern, fusion and local cuisines (Kilichan, Karamustafa & Birdir 2021).

The Food Tourism Trends that will be displayed and analyzed in this sub-chapter are: Food Festivals, Technology, Sustainability, Solo Exploring, Food Market- Halls and Micro Food Trips.



Figure 2. Food Tourism Trends (Haaga-Helia, Lab8 2019)

The above Food Trends have been of great interest in the past and continue to be of interest in the present. They will be analyzed one by one so that the reader can comprehend the trends and the differences between them.

Food festivals are usually held to promote specific products (food or drinks) from specific regions with various and special ways of cooking, always combined with entertainment. Food festivals always give the chance to the attendees to enjoy cuisines and experience local culture simultaneously (Mohi, Wu & Wong 2013, 31). According to Lewis 1997, food festivals are “popular festivals that purport to center on and revolve around, food are a social phenomenon encountered in virtually all human cultures, from the ritual banquets of ancient Rome to the chili cook-offs of Texas today.” In addition, the more interesting the products that are displayed, the more people will attend and the more interested they will be. The significance of food festivals is so grand that play a key role in promoting destinations and attracting visitors (Mohi & al. 2013, 31).

According to Lab8 2019, “ Food travel experiences continue to incorporate today’s technology advancements to generate superior experiential dining moments”. With the continuous development of technology, more and more innovative experiences will appear in food tourism, fascinating people who may be bored of the same experiences. Nowadays, technology is the driving force behind food travel, AR/VR, IoT, robotics and AI will be the mainstream food travel industry (Lab8 2019). For instance, AR or VR can be used for virtual tours provision (restaurants origins, farm to table journeys or even imaginary words), (Senior 2023). Those techniques can be the step for the creation of immersive and unique dining experiences. As Lab8 is reporting, “Phygital experiences bring the digital experience to life in the physical world.”

The definition of sustainability is when the activities, people and institutions of a place coexist with the natural resources, history, social and cultural values of the place itself (Star, Rolfe & Brown 2020). “According to Booking.com, today’s global travelers would rather skip a

destination altogether if they feel their visit there would impact the locals negatively” (Lab8 2019). Nowadays, sustainability is an essential factor in travelers’ decisions and influences their choices in relation to food tourism and beyond. Under the big umbrella of sustainability travellers, locals, businesses, employees and places are having the chance to flourish (Lab8 2019). Moreover, travellers in recent years are seeking new experiences concerning the environment, locals and cultures while contributing to a sustainable economy and local economy development. (Seaside with Emily 2021).

A trend that is increasingly making its appearance is solo travelling and more and more people prefer to go alone than ever before but not because of the non-existence of travelling-partner but for the endeavor of self-preservation (Lab8 2019). According to BBC News 2023, “The number of people Googling "solo travel" this year has almost doubled compared to five years ago”, a number which shows the huge demand for this trend. Solos Holidays, 2023 give us the reasons behind solo travelling: Safer than ever before, there is no stigma, it is easy, new connections are creating and finally satisfying the crave for new experiences.

Another trend that is rising over the years is about food markets/halls. According to Matarese 2023, "The hottest trend in dining out in 2023 is the food hall" and more and more people are immersed in this experience. The concept behind the notion of food market/halls is locals vendors giving the chance to the attendees to try a variety of traditional dishes in one single meal and there is the bonus of entertaining with art or music ( Schultz 2019). Lab8 describe food market/halls as "synonymous with traveling and exploring local culture". Authenticity and locality are the key words for this food experience.

Lab8 claims "24-hour holidays - the future of travel". Small getaways have become mainstream giving people the chance to be immersed in food experiences that will take them out of their ordinary daily routine. According to Skelley 2023, "Micro-holidays could be an antidote to the daily life burnout that's become commonplace" The development of technology and transportation systems gives people the opportunity to take advantage of their free time ( even if only for a few hours) and enjoy a dining experience away from their daily routine (Lab8 2019). Moreover, another benefit of micro-food trips is the low cost and the more sustainability than other travel forms (Restle 2023). Weekend trips or food stopovers are some of the "adventures" that comprise the micro-food trips (Lab8 2019).

## 2.4 Successful Food Tourism Destinations

Food could easily be considered as a marketing tool since it is the basic element behind people cultures and their countries ( Rand & Heath 2008). There are hundreds of countries where there are hidden taste experiences that could attract millions of tourists/travellers worldwide. According to Lynch 2023 "We've all started to realize that many of our favourite things to do on vacation and the strongest memories we take back home with us have to do with food" and several times it is done unconsciously. Moreover, part of the huge growth of food tourism and simultaneously the food tourism destinations has played, the development of culinary media that with its constant promotion, influences most travellers (Richards 2002).

There are plenty of reasons to visit a destination, but there are even more gastronomic reasons to enjoy it. According to UNWTO, some reasons behind food travelling are "the reflection of culture, heritage, traditions and sense of community of different peoples. It is a way of promoting understanding among different cultures, and of bringing people and traditions closer together". Based on food, many destinations can be benefited by the branding, destination image and tourism promotion (Richards 2015).

Whatever has to do with food and beverages might affect tourist decision about a tourism destination, therefore by helping local economies (Kim, Eves & Scarles 2009). It does not matter if the food is about experimental cuisines, street food, Michelin restaurants or even classic cuisine (Conde Nast Traveller 2023).

At the table below, the best 10 food destinations according to Trip Advisor will be displayed.

Table 2. Best Food Destinations (Trip Advisor 2023).

10 BEST FOOD DESTINATIONS 2023		
1	Rome	Italy
2	Crete	Greece
3	Hanoi	Vietnam
4	Florence	Italy
5	Paris	France
6	Bercelona	Spain
7	Lisbon	Portugal
8	Naples	Italy
9	New Orlean	USA
10	Jamaica	Jamaica

At the top of the table is Rome, Italy. The first thing one consider when making a visit to Rome is the food (Woods 2023). Specializing in all types of pasta they offer an unforgettable dining experience that everyone will surely want to visit again (Conde Nast Traveller 2023). The Colosseum might be one of the most renowned monuments in Rome but also a city that hides the dream food of food lovers (Aldern 2023). With only a few ingredients but properly cooked, very interesting dishes can be created (Itzkowitz 2023).

In second place on the table is the Cretan Island in Greece. There is a diverse range of experiences that every traveler can enjoy. Wholly based cuisine all the year and abundance in vegetables and fruits Cretan recipes are part of the Mediterranean diet (Koutsovasilis 2023). Number one destination in Greece (Discover Greece 2023) and well-known worldwide.

Hanoi, Vietnam follows in the table. Conquering the third place impressing travellers with its street food experiences. Street Food tours are part of its sidewalk culture and is an excellent way to be immersed into Vietnamese food culture. "Hanoi has rightfully earned its status as a haven for food enthusiasts" (Vinpearl 2023).

The fourth place in the table is occupied by Florence, Italy. There is a huge history behind Tuscany which influences their traditional cuisine. Travellers can enjoy their taste buds in different flavors such as meat, pasta and the best gelato in Italy (Crowell 2022)

In fifth place on the list of the food destinations for 2023 is Paris. French cuisine is a landmark in world gastronomy with millions of food lovers visiting it for its delicacies. An interesting fact is that UNESCO "declared the French way of eating an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010" (Devour 23 August 2023). In the City of Light, savories and sweets of all categories can be explored by travellers and be immersed in an unforgettable experience (Reddel & Laskaris 2022).

In sixth place there is a Spain city, Barcelona. Barcelona is one of the best Spanish cities for food (Bryony 2023). Influenced from the Catalan culture, Barcelona offers a food scene totally different from other Spanish cuisines (Crowe 2023). Crowded restaurants and fresh food markets brimming with Catalan products are some of the places that impress foodies' travellers (Spencer 2022). Barcelona is considered one of the most popular cities worldwide because of its food experiences (Crowe 2023).

Next comes Lisbon, Portugal. This beautiful Mediterranean city, food lovers can try the delicious Mediterranean based food. Portuguese cuisine has a variety of flavors and rich aromas that make travellers willing to experience the local cuisine (Santos 2017). It is well known that

in Lisbon and Portugal in general, most people love seafood as the country is surrounded by the sea. "Portugal ranks #3 in the world most fish consumed per capital" (Jepson 2023)

In the eighth place we will meet another Italian city, Naples. Impressing travellers with its mouthwatering pizza. A beautiful fusion cuisine with complex flavors, made from local ingredients (Mihir 2023). The fresh and local ingredients they use, such as olive oil, buffalo mozzarella, fresh basil and tomatoes make the distinction (Conde Nast Traveller 2023).

In the penultimate place of the table is New Orleans of USA. A city filled with iconic dishes which define the city's cuisine and culture to the outside world (Lorell & Staff 2023). A Cajun, Creole and African cuisine, influenced by Spanish, French and Vietnamese traditions make New Orleans stand out from any other USA destination (Lopez 2023). Moreover, attracts millions of tourists every year and is considered one of the culinary capitals of the U.S (Quinn 2015).

The last place on the table belongs to Jamaica. Jamaican cuisine tremendously influenced for several years by cultures that had come to the island a long period before (Waltner 2021). Native Taino and Arawak tribes have given their own stamp on this cuisine style (Kelly 2023). Wide food variety with traditional flavors rich in spices which satisfying locals and visitors (Cheng 2021).

## **2.5 Greece as a Food Tourism Destination**

Many beautiful countries are in Europe, but nowhere is like Greece (Huw 2023). Greece has the potential to stand out from any other destination, it is not only good meal inspired by a cuisine but it is about an entire philosophy, a way of life and a diverse experience (Athanasopoulou 2019 ; Eptakili 2022). The combination of fresh ingredients in any unique recipe with authenticity and hospitality that the locals can offer, makes this destination one of the most famous in the world with millions of visitors every year.

Furthermore, a huge distinction for Greece and its gastronomy was achieved for 2023 as it was awarded as the 3<sup>rd</sup> best cuisine in the world among 100 other cuisines (Taste Atlas 2023). Thus, giving a significant boost to the development of its food tourism. Unforgettable Greece 2023, recommend a food adventure which is suitable for everyone, whether seafood, meat or vegetarian dishes are preferable, Greek cuisine has a wide variety of tastes. Travellers could try totally different styles of food in every corner of the country since Greek cuisine has been shaped mostly by the geography of the country (Greek National Tourism Organization 2023). The most important element in Greek Food Tourism is that all travellers can be part of some of



the biggest trends that conquer the majority of people and more and more adventurers worldwide are embracing in them in their travels.

Food festivals in Greece are thriving every year and it is an opportunity for the local producers to promote their products and for the attendees to satisfying themselves. Athens, Tinos, Lesvos, Leonidio Peloponnese and Sifnos are considered the best places for food festivals (Walker 2023). Athens Street food festival has been organized every year since 2016 with great success with more and more participants wanting to promote their own street food (Events Organized by Detox 2023). The big love for artichokes has made people of Tinos Island organize a festival for this ingredient every year. Traditional recipes based on artichoke are made and offered by producers with a combination of warm hospitality and traditional music (Greeka 2019). One more island that magnetizes with its beauty and the food is Lesvos. Every year in July hosts the Lesvos Food Festival and local drinks and food are offered to the inhabitants and not only (Walker 2023). A festival called "Nikolaos Tselementes" is celebrated every year in Sifnos, a traditional festival with the combination of cuisines and flavors from all around Cycladic islands (Discover Greece 2023). Food lovers will be able to taste recipes from a whole cluster of islands in a single festival. One more vegetable which is honored in a Greek place is the eggplant. Especially in Leonidio Peloponnese a huge festival takes place there with live music, dancing lessons and a lot of entertainment (Paravantes 2023).

Greece has been named by the Lonely Planet Publishing company as the best destination in the sustainable "Food Category" on their "Best in Travel" for 2021(Wichmann 2020), a significant title trying to preserve and fulfill those expectations. According to Vernicos INSETE President "Tourism has made significant progress in recent years, improving the tourist product and life of residents, but at the same time also creating increased demands to face modern challenges". A growing demand for sustainable tourism activities and services are needed (Krinis 2023).

Greece is an extremely safe destination for solo travelers (Gabi 2023). Safety issues are what gnaw in the mind of solo travellers and it is very important to have someone to assure you of your safety. Cafes, traditional taverns, bars are places where tourists can explore and have fun meeting other people and personalities. The best reason for solo travelling is the freedom that comes with it and the experiences that will be etched in the mind forever (Whittaker 2023).

Eric Wolf, Founder of World Food Travel Association claims that gastronomy tourism is estimated at \$1 trillion globally (Gastronomy Tours 2023), giving Greece the opportunity, to be a part of this huge number. It is believed, with the blossom of veganism over the last years

Greece could be the leader in the industry since the vegetable-based cuisine is the dominant one (Eptakili 2022).

### 3 Experience Economy and Authenticity

In this chapter, experience economy and authenticity are analyzed. The evolution of the experience economy will be presented and analyzed comprehensively. Additionally, the 4 realms in the context of Food Tourism will be explained and the chapter will conclude with an explanation of the authenticity and the background history.

According to Pine & Gilmore (2011), "Good and services are no longer enough". People have the necessity to escape from their daily life and the endless exhausting routines. With great simplicity to be understood by all, Pine & Gilmore (2011) gave the term of experience economy as the "the selling of memorable experiences to customers" or was "defined by its predominant economic offering: what a buyer obtains from a seller in exchange for money". Many businesses have set this mindset, trying to sell a unique experience rather than a product. There is a sequence to this entire evolution, starting from the Agrarian Economy moving to the Industrial Economy and then to the Service Economy and finally the Economy that most of the people are seeking, which is the Experience Economy. This evolution is going to be analyzed in the below sub-chapter of this thesis. To get to the point of experience, goods and services are needed, therefore the result of the experience is a combination of all of these and each of them plays its own significant role (Localist 2021). An experience is created when intentionally services are used as a stage and goods as props to engage and immerse customers in a meaningful and unforgettable environment (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

Nowadays, authenticity is an element that all consumers are seeking, while its meaning and the way each of them experiences it is purely personal, as everyone's background influences their perception of it. According to Chhabra (2005), "Authenticity is often staged and commodified to meet the needs of the tourist". Moreover, it has to do with something distinct. A different and unique experience that the consumer has never experienced before and they would willingly attempt it (Gilmore & Pine 2007). Authenticity as a term is rarely comprehended by consumers and considered than can be acquired like an objectively agreed entity (MacCannell 1992).

#### 3.1 Evolution of Experience Economy

The first time that the experience economy was described and presented in the world was before 20 years. Moreover, historically speaking, even in ancient times there was the idea of the experience economy as the Greeks and Romans sold experiences and earned money by doing that. (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen 2007). The example of the birthday cake is very

illustrative for the evolution of the experience economy to be fully understood and to get into the meaning of the evolution.

At the base of the pyramid is the agricultural economy, which means that mothers made the cake from agricultural products such as (sugar, butter and flour). At the bottom of the pyramid is the industrial economy, in which the purchase of one or two ready-made ingredients facilitates the making of the cake. As the top is approached, there is the service economy, at which point the cake is bought ready-made from a bakery but of course at five times the price. At the end and at the top of the pyramid there is the creation of experience, the economy of the experience. At this point paying extra money, parents prefer the event-party stage to an external agent thus creating the coveted experiences (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

The following pyramid will display the evolution of experience economy.

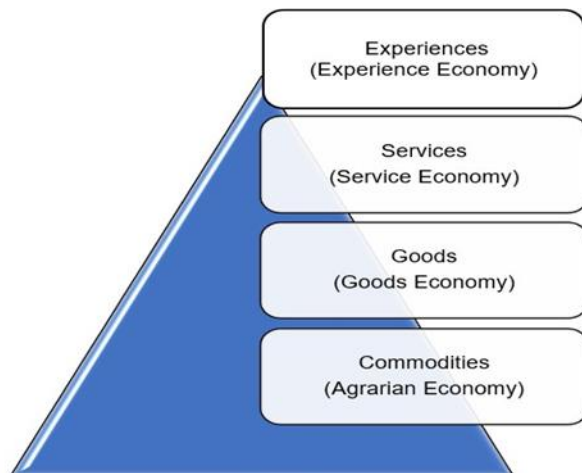


Figure 3. Harvard Business Review – Welcome to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Progress of Economic Value

Nowadays, the experience part is very meaningful for the customers and it is a factor that they value 100%. Consequently, everybody is aiming for the top of the pyramid from both sides (customers – businesses). Statistically speaking,

- "88% of customers report that CX is a key factor in their buying decisions" (Krayewski 2023).
- "86% of consumers are willing to pay more if they know they'll receive an outstanding customer experience" (Krayewski 2023).
- "61% of customers will switch to a competitor after a single bad experience" (Krayewski 2023).

Always all individuals unrelated to the occupation or industry in which they belonged, valued anything distinct in their lives than what existed in their daily routine, which was experiences

(Pine & Gilmore 2013) and this is achieved when businesses act like theaters, "Work is a Theatre and Every Business a Stage" (Pine & Gilmore 1998). This evolution from commodities to experiences has developed a different mindset in all and at all stages and with the course of time it will grow more and more and eventually more stages may be created.

### 3.2 Four Realms of Food Tourism

As already mentioned above, experiences in the recent years is a factor that is taken into consideration by consumers without a second thought. They are looking for a hint to escape from their daily routine, even at the most elementary level. Furthermore, consumers need and demand new and innovative approaches to the products and services (Mehmetoglu & Engen 2011). Companies must be aware of how to design an experience and customers will evaluate the value of the price (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Additionally, a very influential notion for that era which as it turned out to be true, is that "Some companies will eventually be like trade shows, charging customers to sell to them" (Pine & Gilmore 1998). According to Pine & Gilmore (2019) there are four dimensions to creating an experience. Entertainment, Educational, Escapist and Esthetic are the realms that contribute to experiences. There is an axis of passive and active experiences that those realms are and the participants are either absorbed or immersed. The four experience realms will be displayed on the above figure.

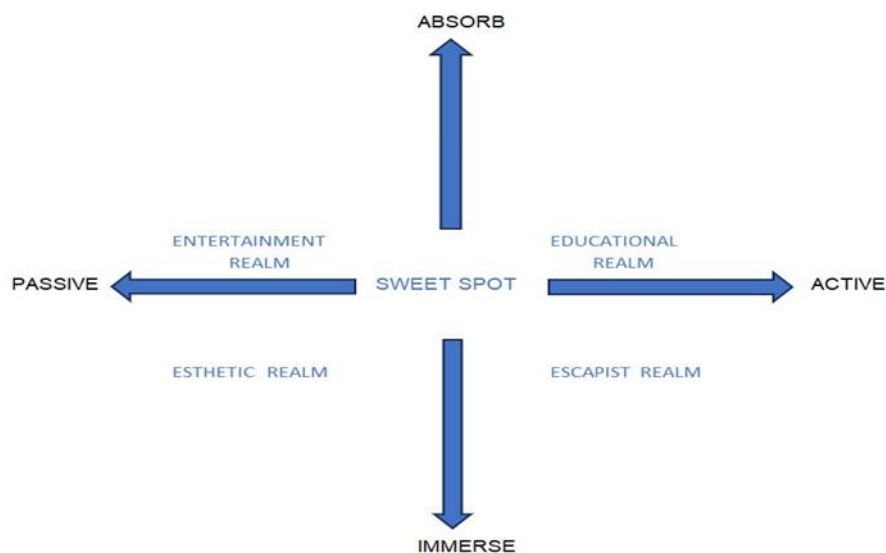


Figure 4. Four realms of experience (Pine and Gilmore 2019)

According to Pine & Gilmore (1998), entertainment realm, include "activities" such as watching TV or attending a concert in which participants can easily be absorbed and usually

acting more passively than actively. The next absorbed realm is the educational, in which participants are more active while a new skill is learned (taking a ski lesson). In the escapist realm actively and absorption are combined in "activities" such as playing in an orchestra. Active participation is not required in the last realm, Esthetic. On the other hand, "activities" in this realm such as visiting an art gallery, can be immersive (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

These realms can be integrated with great success into a food experience. Furthermore, such experiences can easily reach the sweet spot, where the experience succeeds in fitting into all four realms and offering the consumer the maximum of this experience, making them willing to do it again.

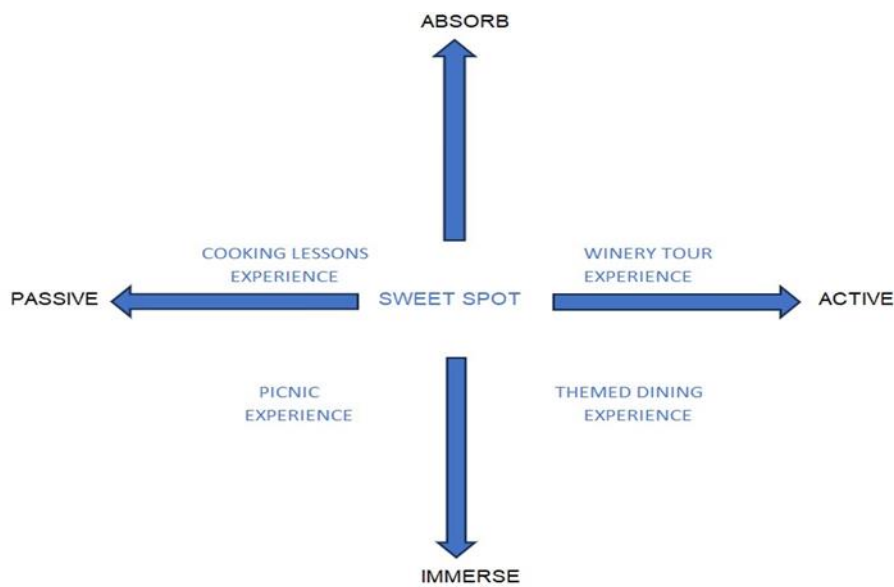


Figure 5. Four Realms of Food Experiences

As shown in figure 5, there are many food experiences that can fulfill all experiences fields. The author in this sub-chapter wants to show how easily, targeted food experiences can be part of all experiences realms and according to Pine & Gilmore (1998) be in the sweet spot, meaning the satisfaction of all kinds of realms in the same environment. A winery tour can be entertainment for a winery show. Moreover, learning the story behind the winery makes it educational. The esthetic part comes from the stunning views and the realm of escapism from participating in activities such as grape picking.

Cooking lessons can fulfil the entertainment realm while having fun and enjoying the lessons with other participants. Learning and improving cooking skills can be educational and escapist because participants will have the chance to be part of the lessons and make their own

foods and recipes. A beautiful, staged kitchen nicely decorated can contribute to the esthetic realm.

Themed dining experiences always impress consumers. Music that suits the theme can be the entertainment part, while the description of the dishes can teach them new things and fulfill the educational realm. A well decorated restaurant according to theme can contribute to the esthetic realm. The escapist realm is filled with taking part in the experience, perhaps in dancing.

The picnic experience loved by young and old alike. Enjoying the company of the other participants with possible musical accompaniment meet the entertainment realm. Being in nature, seeing wonderful landscapes fill the esthetic realm and learning more about the picnic location does it and educational. Being in touch with nature is certainly an experience that can assist participants to escape from their daily routine and be relaxed.

### **3.3 Authenticity for Consumers**

The origin of the term authentic comes from the old Greeks and the Online Etymology Dictionary, gives the origin of term. Is a combination of three different words. 'Hentes' meaning doer or being, 'autos' meaning self and 'sene' meaning to accomplish or to achieve. The word originates from "autentikos" and derived from "authentēs".

According to (Lehman & al. 2018) , authenticity has become widely known and the increase in demand is due to modernization. "The term authentic is used either in the strong sense of being of undisputed origin or authorship, or in a weaker sense of being faithful to an original or a reliable, accurate representation" (Varga & Guignon 2014). As far as the notion of authenticity is concerned, there is a lot of agreement on the superficial part of the notion, of how something is "real", "true" or "genuine". On the other hand, looking deeper, academics use the term itself and give a different approach, applying it from various angles ( Lehman & al. 2018).

Sapoti (2021), in her thesis mentions the fact that tourists/travellers are already aware that they are being exposed to something "fake" and in a situation that is created only for them and thus do not seek authenticity. On the other hand, authenticity is one of the most important factor that travellers are seeking and usually the authenticity determined by the pureness and naturality of an experience which is unaffected by the modern world ( MacCannell 1976).

All experiences are personal and everyone experiences them individually regardless of their background. Moreover, they are unique and most of the time authenticity that can be brought out in one consumer, in the other consumer, is not provided at all (Gilmore & Pine 2007). Being authentic means being honest and keeping your promises. If a brand is authentic consumers will understand that and will be willing to visit it repeatedly without thinking about the expenses (Pulliainen 2021). Authenticity is one of the most significant elements to attract and keep a consumer. According to Nealon (2022), "You cannot buy trust, it has to be earned" and it can be achieved by acting authentic and with reliability.

Authenticity as a concept affect the daily life of consumers at all aspects, "from consumer products to tourism, to art appreciation, to interpersonal interactions" (Newman & Smith 2016). Authenticity is very significant since, a strong connection can be builded with the consumers, through trust and credibility (Esiekpe 2023). The element that all consumers expect in their authentic experiences is reliability and trustworthiness and to be statistically comprehensible, 90% of customers noted authenticity as an important factor in their decision on which brand to choose (Georgiou 2021).



## 4 Research Methods

This part of the thesis discusses the methodology which was used. Furthermore, analyse the data collecting method, as well as the data analysing method which will be explained precisely. Details about the research process will be given and the final part will be discussing ethical considerations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and comprehend tourists' perception about authenticity in Greek Food experiences. Below research-questions and sub-question will be given.

### Research-Question:

What is the overall perception of tourists about the authenticity of Greek Food experiences in the context of Tourism?

### Research Sub-Questions:

- **Sub-question 1:** What are the elements that contribute to the authenticity of Greek food tourism experiences for tourists?
- **Sub-question 2:** Which factors (locals or food habits) have a greater impact on authenticity?
- **Sub-question 3:** What are the expectations of tourists regarding authenticity in food experiences in a Greek destination?
- **Sub-question 4:** How crucial is authenticity in Greek food experiences for a traveler?

To complete correctly a research, the two main methods used are qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative has to do with a limited range of people taking part in research. It is concerned with and based on human behaviour and can be implemented by various methods, such as interviews, observation, focus groups and other related techniques (Girardin 2023). On the other hand, quantitative research has to do with numbers and statistics and involve an extend percentage of people. To produce outcomes from it, it concerned with the quantification and analysis of variables. In addition, they provide statistical techniques, hence the numerical data are analyzed (Apuke 2017).

### 4.1 Semi – Structured Interviews as Data Collection Method

Qualitative research will be used for the findings of this thesis, since the main goal of the author is to comprehend and analyze a specific range of people regarding their perception of the experiences of Food Tourism in Greece. Additionally, it will deal with feelings, ideas and experiences which are the main elements that concern this method (Ugwu & Eze 2023, 20).

Quantitative research will not suit well in this specific thesis because it has to do with numerical data while explaining a particular phenomenon, or particular questions analyzed with mathematical methods (Sukamolson 2007). On the other hand, qualitative research is comprehending the surroundings of the individuals and that is the main purpose of this thesis (Ugwu & Eze 2023, 20), to understand tourists' perception about authenticity in Greek Food experiences. There are a variety of methods that can be used from qualitative research to extract impressive outcomes for research. To begin with, there is the interview process, a very useful tool that can help to a great extent and that can produce a sufficient amount of data. There are three fundamental categories which are going to be analyzed in the next sub-chapter (structured, unstructured, and semistructured interviews). Moreover, focus groups are roughly similar to less structured interviews with the difference that the data are collected from all participants together, hence the name focus (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick 2008). Proceeding to the last part of methodology that will be referred to, we define the method of observation and based on its terminology, it has to do with observation. All the observational information is recorded and from there the results are derived (Kumar 2022).

In this thesis semistructured one-on-one interviews are the more suitable method than the others because the findings will be more reliable if it is gained directly from the interviewer. The author believes that through the interviews all candidates will be able to express themselves freely without any limitations and will give the best results with rich information, innovative for the topic of this thesis, easier to process it (Kakilla 2021, 1). Through interviews, more data about attitudes, behaviours and opinions can be learned and specially in semi-structure interviews creativity can thrive and more information can occur (Ugwu & Eze 2023, 26). One major element that makes semistructure much more effectively, is the flexibility which many times overcome the limitations of statistical analysis ( Horton, Macve & Struyven 2004, 340). The uses of semi- structure interviews is usually when information about the topic is already known, but new issues want to be raised by the user (Wilson 2013, 24). Additionally, the freedom of interviews helps interviewers to be further free to let go and bring out thoughts in specific areas of interest and give more depth and breadth to the topic (Horton & al. 2004, 340).

## **4.2 Interviews**

The outcomes of this research will be extracted from an interview process. According to Mashuri, Sarib, Alhabsyi & Syam, (2022) interview can be defined "as an interaction between two people on a particular occasion, where one acts as an interviewer and another as an

interviewee". Furthermore, it is defined as an inter-view between people who are discussing and exchange opinions about a certain topic (Kvale 2016). The process of asking questions and getting answers may seem initially "simple", but in the end it is not as "simple" as it seems at the outset (Fontana & Frey 2000). According to (Jamshed 2014), "qualitative interview is a type of framework in which the practices and standards be not only recorded, but also achieved, challenged and as well as reinforced". To conduct a successful research interview from which the researcher will be benefited, the following steps are required. The first step is to define the objectives and then choose the type of format to be used. Secondly, the questions should be prepared and the appropriate participants to be selected. The third and final stage is the preparation and the conduction of the interview (Indeed 2022). When conducting research involving interviews, there is always the question of how many people should participate. According to (Dworkin 2012), 5 to 50 can be considered enough. The number of participants will doubtless depend on whether saturation exists. By saturation in qualitative research is meant the sufficiency at themes where after this stage there will not be any additional information provided (Rosala 2021). Each researcher can have the option to choose which type of interviews to follow as there are many varieties and the difference of which is more obvious in term of the methodological approach (Madill 2012). Among the types of interviews there are structured, unstructured and semi structured interviews (Wildemuth 2017).

"A structured interview is one where the interviewer uses a standard set of questions that they ask each candidate. Meaning, they don't really improvise or go "off script" based on how the conversation is going" (Xu 2023). Moreover, this type of interviews is considered more effective as questions are structured on a clearly defined role and its key objectives (Beales 2023). Therefore, it may be beneficial to avoid interference in the research by the respondents' various questions (Rogers & Bender 2018). Commonly used by researchers doing qualitative research, usually closed ended questions and because of the restricted set of answer choices, data can easily be collected and analyzed (Dovetail 2023).

Unstructured interview uses a free form question in contrast to the structured interview, in which specific questions are already predetermined (Madill 2012). It is used in qualitative research and is a useful tool that helps researchers to probe personal experiences mainly towards the early stages of research (Dovetail 2023). "The unstructured interview technique was developed in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology as a method to elicit people's social realities" and through this type of interviews, because there is no fixed structure, it stimulates a comfort and flexibility that naturally leads to the production of wonderful and solid results (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009 ; Bashin 2023).

The last type of interview is semistructured which will be used in this research by the author. It is one of the most famous types of interviews used in qualitative research (Madill 2012). The purpose of semistructured interviews is the information gather from respondents with personal experiences, perceptions and beliefs about a certain topic (Dejonckheere & Vaughn 2019). Semistructured interviews consist of a combination of closed and open-ended questions (Adams 2015). Furthermore, participants can be comfortable and a mutual communication exists, it enables time and space for the interviewees to open up about the topic but also assists the researcher's part as they can guide the discussion and be on topic through their already prepared questions (Shakespeare 2023).

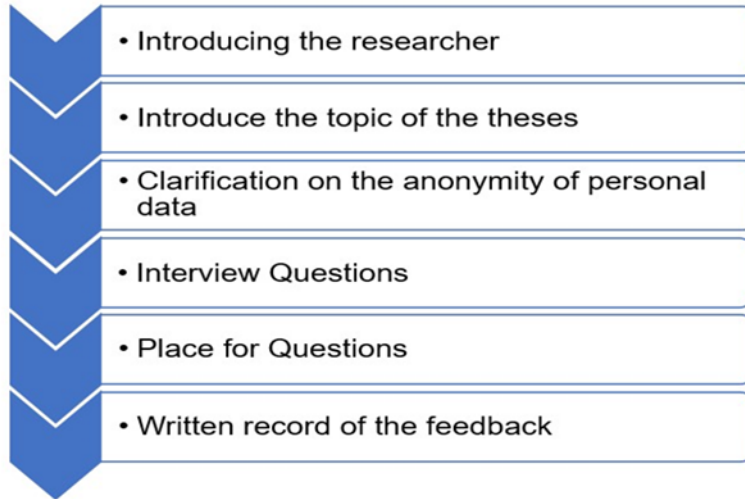
Reaching the point of the questions that will be asked to the interviewees, they have been meticulously selected by the author to suit and answer the main question concerning the general opinion of travellers about authenticity of Greek Food Tourism. Furthermore, all 4 sub-questions must be answered, concerning the importance of authenticity, the expectations they have regarding Greek Food Tourism and the elements and factors that influence it. Additionally, the topic of this thesis is about authenticity in Greek Food Tourism, therefore the author considers it appropriate that the interview questions should be based on sub-chapter 3.3. Moreover, the interview questions that will be conducted will be based on the sub-questions that have been given. In fact, some "themes" will be created, which will be related to the sub-questions of this research. Interview questions will be focused on the "personal viewpoints" of the travellers, the "significance" of food tourism and "sentiments" they derive from it. To ensure a valid outcome, the format of the interview questions was pre-tested in third respondents before being used for the research. Through this testing it was found that: the questions are easily comprehensible, interesting outcomes can be extracted by them and perhaps one of the most impressive is that the topic of this research is of great interest, making participants not to be bored and able to give 100% of themselves.

### **4.3 Research Process**

As already mentioned above in previous subchapters, the methodology that will be used to collect the necessary data and that will lead to an adequate and reliable result is the one-on-one interviews. The interviews will take place in the capital of Greece, Athens. The main candidates who, in the opinion of the author, will ensure the best possible outcome are the travellers/tourists with an average age of 40 years who visit Greece to discover the field of Food Tourism. The idea behind the interviews is to get sincere feedback without any doubts or any influence from third parties, thus adding to the credibility of this research.

## Interview Process

Table 3. Interview Process.



The interview process will be conducted in two days. Once the author has gone to the place where the interviews will take place and more specifically to Syntagma Square and the surrounding areas, which are likely to be more frequented by food tourists. When a suitable interviewee for the author has been found, the writer will introduce himself and the reasons why is interesting to do this interview. Moreover, the topic and the reasons behind the theses will be explained (what results want to be extracted). Having comprehended the topic of the theses, the interviewee will be assured that his/her answers will be anonymized. At this point, the interviews will be able to take place and space for questions will be given before any answers (the author wishes all his questions to be fully understood). The recording of all responses will be done in writing as it might be more helpful for the author.

### 4.4 Thematic Analysis as a Data Analyzing Method

To enable the author to provide comprehensible results from the interviews that will be conducted, the most appropriate method must be used. According to him, the use of thematic analysis is the most suitable method and will ensure the highest possible outcome. "Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun 2015).

Thematic analysis is useful when research has to do with people's experiences, opinions and viewpoints (Warren 2023). It is a method focused on identifying and explaining themes, codes

are then developed representing the previously themes and applied to data for later analysis. (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2019). To make it more understandable to the reader, thematic analysis takes several data and categorizes them according to their similarities (themes) and from there the results come out (Warren 2023). "Thematic analysis is the study of patterns to uncover meaning" (Crosley 2021).

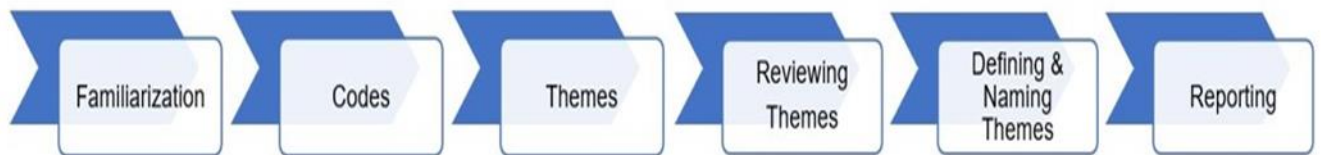


Figure 6. Thematic Analysis 6 Steps Process

The first step of this method has to do with familiarization. The writers will have to become familiar with the data they have collected by reading it repeatedly. A useful and effective approach is to start by taking notes (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). In the second step, once the familiarization with the data is completed, it is time to generate codes. These codes should represent the meaning and patterns that preceded from the data. The more familiar the writer is with the data, the easier the coding can be. In data with similar meaning the same codes may be applied (Delve & Limpaecher 2020). As we move on to the next step, we will encounter the themes. Themes are patterns with a significance about the data or the research questions. In this step, the codes that were created are no longer converted into themes. The purpose of this step is to organize broader themes that will lead to better writing results (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Reaching the point of revising themes, the author has to assure that there is enough data so that a theme can be supported. Furthermore, if some themes are similar to each other, they can be merged and others that do not have enough data can be removed (Delve & Limpaecher 2020). In the penultimate step, before the written production, the themes must be defined and named. The meaning of each theme must be defined and once this has been done a succinct name can be provided (Paperpile 2023). Finishing the steps, it is time for the written narrative. There should be coherence in the narrative, so that it can be understood by the reader but also be coherent. The finished form should include the author's perspective on the story (Delve & Limpaecher 2020).

## 5 Results

In this chapter, the author will present and analyze the data collected from the research and more specifically from the semistructure interviews. Seven interviews were conducted successfully, from which intriguing results were obtained, some closer to the framework and some not. Throughout the interviews, answers were given to all sub-questions and to the main research question addressed by the author. Furthermore, many similarities were found among the interviewees' responses, making the author understand that Food Tourism travellers have common viewpoints and standards. The interviews took place in the center of Athens, in places where food lovers frequent. They involved individuals whose main purpose in a trip is to learn about the eating habits of the place they are visiting and thus were able to provide answers helpful to the author and readers. The people who participated and assisted in the research were median age of 45 years and of these 4 were men and 3 were women. The interviews were completed in 2 days. On 25 and 26 January and lasted about 15 minutes each. For the convenience of the author and interviewees, the interviews were not tape recorded but the notes were handwritten.

### 5.1 Interview Results

Among travellers for the reason of Food Tourism and the experiences offered, various emotions are being created, the most prevalent being that of uniqueness. Life-time feelings are created by the unique experiences one can have when visiting Greece. Travellers who come to Greece interested in food tourism, which as mentioned above is very developed and more and more are seeking it, come with the predisposition to learn new facts about food and their culture and history. The word authenticity in the Greek food tourism context is automatically linked to the human factor and the quality of each product. It seems that the contribution of the human factor (locals) is particularly taken into consideration, making tourists keep it in mind during their visits. Additionally, it is more than just about food, according to one of the interviewees, "Authenticity is the perceived sincerity and the genuineness of an experience". Looking a little deeper into the concept and the way they define it, it can be seen how important the human element is, since in its absence nothing is the same. Authenticity in Greek food tourism can be defined by the locality of the products in relation to their history and culture, but also by their interaction with locals.

There are various elements that can have an impact on the authenticity of a Greek food experience. The most important element highlighted by most of the interviewees is related to the local traditional food. The concept of traditional food and local flavours is an appealing factor for food tourism travellers and they tend to include it in each and every one of their excursions. Local products/ingredients originating from Greek regions, cooked in a specific and distinctive style,

emphasizing the culture of each place and the way of life. By proceeding with the contributing elements to the authenticity of a Greek food experience the human contact context will be encountered. Human interaction has been scientifically proven in past studies to be beneficial and effective in the process of developing experiences. A warm smile from the locals and their companionship can make an experience unique from the outset. Additionally, the enjoyment of a dinner for which the choices have been carefully made by local people who know how to guide food lovers in the best way by providing them with a memorable experience. One element, besides food and human interaction that was mentioned in the interviews has to do with the location. It is undoubtedly a factor that can affect the authenticity of an experience as each place has beauties that can characterize and distinguish it from any other place.

Of great interest was the comparison of human factor and food habits for which of the two has a greater influence on the authenticity of a Greek food experience. By interacting and communicating with locals, their food habits, culture and history can easily be comprehensible. Every aspect can be counted, even the way a person (local) can serve a dish and explain the history of that food, automatically provides a food experience, which alone as a dish could not be achieved. Human interaction is considered so essential that without the presence of the locals nothing would be the same and authenticity would not exist. On the other hand, there are also the viewpoints of people who combine both and deem them equally important, with the belief that neither one is enough on its own and that one complements the other. In the beginning, comes the contact with people and in the end comes the contact with their eating habits.

The results of this research revealed that the only thing that travellers expect regarding authenticity in their Greek food tourism experiences is the locality (in all its aspects). Obviously, the first concern about locality on products (local ingredients and recipes of each place with rich historical background, highlighting the culture and beauty of each place). Furthermore, the topic of locality is related as well to locals and the unique approach they can offer authenticity in a very simplified experience without being extraordinary (this is achieved by their warm hospitality and the kindness they have by always being close to the tourists and their needs). Moreover, locality can also be connected with locals' habits and activities that for travellers are unusual and have never seen or tried before (traditional dances, trading on local markets or even farming).

Authenticity is a very crucial criterion surrounding all types of tourism, let alone food tourism. The purpose of a trip beyond relaxation is to become familiar with the place, the people and their habits. All of which can be achieved only through authenticity. But how crucial authenticity can be in Greek food experiences from the traveler's point of view. Through authenticity comes



contact and connection with the place and the people. As has been mentioned several times, communication is the key to success. Moreover, travellers can be immersed in their experiences if there is a part of authenticity and can feel even better and fascinating through immersion. Experiences are moments and the moments create feelings. Emotions, with the help of authenticity can be as a lifetime and always be remembered. Additionally, apart from travellers, there are several benefits for the travel destinations themselves. The key element that was highlighted by all interviewees is that through authenticity, a destination will be more appreciated and therefore there will be a high demand for it, thus helping the local community (development, economy).

Reaching the end of the results, a general summary of the data would be quite helpful for the readers' understanding. It has been mentioned numerous times that authenticity in Greek food experiences is very essential as it determines the traveler's final image of the visited place. Their perception of the authenticity of a food experience is something unique that they will not find anywhere else, whether it is the culture, the food or even the human touch. Authenticity based on the interviewees can be dependent on 3 factors. The local food, the local community and the natural characteristics of a place (location). Comparing which factor has the greatest influence, it has been proven that human contact with diversity can have the most impact, as through the contact with locals of a region they can lead you closer to their food habits, their culture and their history, in the context of the authenticity of a food experience. By a vast majority, the expectation for the authenticity of a Greek food experience is the locality, i.e. everything related to the localness of a community, from all aspects. But how crucial is authenticity for a traveler? According to the data collected from the interviews, authenticity allows travellers to come into interaction with the locals and thus become immersed in a food experience, creating emotions and memories that will be remembered forever. As can be observed, it is a seemingly chain that one leads the other.

## **5.2 Local's Food, Hospitality and Location**

Regarding the aspect of authenticity in a food tourism experience, the main influencing factor that can determine whether it is authentic or not is anything to do with locality. Starting with local products, covering a wide range such as (recipes, cooking methods, food, drinks). Commonly with a visit to a country of gastronomic interest there is the curiosity of local food, something a food traveler has never tried before and is visiting a destination for this reason.

In addition, an element that is highly valued and appreciated by food travellers is the treatment they receive from the local community (locals) as it can have a significant impact on the

authenticity of their experience. The touch with the local people is undoubtedly a positive factor as it is guaranteed of bringing a traveler closer to the region in which they are located. Through contact with the local community, they can even get closer to their culture and food habits. One noteworthy thing to be mentioned is that according to the food travellers without the locals, authenticity would not exist and it is an essential factor since it can affect the whole experience.

Furthermore, another crucial factor that plays a part in the authenticity of a food experience is the location of each destination. This includes the view, the beauty and the architecture of a place that makes it stand out from other places of the world, thus helping to attract travellers of all kinds. For instance, the islands of the Cyclades are also renowned for their aesthetics as the whole island is painted white and blue.

This research allows the reader to comprehend that what is related to the locality of a region also influences the authenticity of an experience (food).

### **5.3 Immersion into an Experience-Life Time Feelings**

Due to the authenticity of a food experience, it is obvious that each participant in an experience will be able to become immersed and be able to experience it 100%. Through their immersion they could have a beautiful time and understand and be part of the unique way of life of locals and their food habits.

The creation of feelings such as pleasure and enjoyment are continually created as travellers feel fulfilled and understand a food experience to the fullest. Greece as a food destination has been described from the interviewees of this research as a gastronomical dream and it is a destination where unforgettable memories are created and will be remembered by many visitors forever.

## **6. Discussion**

In this chapter research outcomes compared with the literature framework, one by one all sub-questions and the main research question will be answered and some recommendation about how and who can be benefited from this research. Moreover, ethical considerations and reliability will be discussed and in the end the learning reflections of the author.

Since authenticity has been discussed and analyzed in previous chapters and its importance has been proven to a considerable and significant extent, the results of this research seem to support it. In sub-Chapter 3.3 Varga & Guignon (2014) use the term authenticity for a strong

and indisputable sense of provenance, which all respondents claimed and based on their responses agreed. If a definition could be given for what authenticity means in the context of Greek food tourism, it would be "locality from every aspect". In this broader context, anything that has to do with localism is included. Proceeding with the authenticity part and its significance. The author achieved to reveal through this research how much the need for authenticity exists. If there is authenticity in food tourism, travellers can effortlessly become immersed in the experience that is provided to them and live their experience in a more enjoyable way. Furthermore, their interaction with the local community and the creation of emotions that will arise from this unquestionably assist in creating a memory that will remain etched in their minds and hearts. MacCannell (1976) in sub-chapter 3.3 mentioned the importance of authenticity, as a factor that all travellers seek and determine it as the pureness and naturality of an experience which is unaffected by the modern world.

According to Pine & Gilmore (2019) there are four dimensions (factors) that contribute to experiences (entertainment, educational, esthetic, escapist realms). Each one separately reflects some particular and through them the ultimate experience can be created. For instance, entertainment realm is more about "activities", educational is about learning new "skills", escapist is the absorption into the experiences and finally the esthetic realms which has to do with views and images (the esthetic part of an experience). Based on the data from the interviews, some elements have been provided that, when combined, correspond to the theoretical background. Three elements were presented that contribute to the authenticity of an experience, making it unforgettable and unique.

Firstly, is the local food since all realms of Pine & Gilmore are suitable, as entertainment can be through activities, such as a cooking lesson and through this the tasting of local foods can be combined with entertainment. Furthermore, can be educational since travellers can enrich their knowledge from a traditional delicacy. Moving on with the beauty of a dish and how it is cared for, the esthetic realm can be fulfilled. Concluding with the first element by covering the last realm the escapist from which through the food offered by the locals they can easily and rapidly become immersed in the experience. The second element contributing to the authenticity of an experience is the local hospitality. From this element leads to the correspondence with 2 realms. The educational realm as the locals can introduce a variety of new concepts and ideas that certainly did not know before. The second realm that corresponds to this case is the escapist realm as an important element of authenticity is the local community and through it all travellers can become immersed. The third and last element that arose from this research and proved to be an important factor of authenticity in an experience is the location. The only part

(realm) that can be suited and combined is the esthetic realm since the location and the beauty of a destination can affect the overall impression of a traveler (negative or positive).

The table below shows and compares the results of the research with the literature framework.

Table 4. Interview Matrix

Interview Questions	Research Question	Literature Review	Outcomes
Q1. Can you describe a memorable Greek Food tourism experience when you felt a strong sense of authenticity?	➤ M.Q	Sub-Chapter 2.5	Experiences which arise strong feelings
Q2. What does the term authenticity mean to you in the context of Greek food tourism?	➤ S.Q 3	Chapter 3	Authenticity means the locality from every aspect
Q3. How significant is the food authenticity to the success of a travel destination?	➤ S.Q 4	Sub-Chapter 2.4	High demand for each destination (development, economic growth)
Q4. In your opinion what elements contribute to the authenticity of food tourism experience?	➤ S.Q 1	Sub-Chapter 3.2	Local food Local's hospitality Location
Q5. Does interacting with locals or food habits have an impact on authenticity?	➤ S.Q 2	Sub-Chapter 2.4	Biggest impact has the interaction with locals
Q6. How do you define authenticity in Greek food tourism?	➤ M.Q	Sub-Chapter 2.5	Defined by the locality of products (history, culture) & interaction with locals
Q7. How significant food authenticity is considered for a traveler?	➤ S.Q 4	Sub-Chapter 3.3	Extremely significant (creation of feelings, touch with locals, immersed into the experiences)

## 6.1 Sub-Question and Main-Question Results

The first sub-question was related to the contributing elements to the authenticity for Greek food tourism experiences and through the collected data those elements are the local food that can be offered from each place all across the country, the local's hospitality who through their hospitality can make food lovers feel comfortable and familiar with the locals and ensure their satisfaction. The last contributing element is the location of each destination with their own beauty, thus referring to a more traditional view of the situation.

Moreover, in response to the second sub-question which has to do with which element (locals or food habits) has a greater influence on the authenticity, the results of the research according to the interviewers responses is the locals. The human factor turned out to be more influential than that of food, impressing the author as he expected the opposite outcome. Human contact from every perspective can lead more quickly and effortlessly to the authenticity of a Greek food experience.

Furthermore, about the third sub-question and the expectation of tourists regarding authenticity in food experiences in a Greek destination, the unanimous response was the locality. This locality is related to all aspects of a food trip and it can be (products, traditional recipes, historical knowledge, human interaction and local's habits).

The answer to the fourth and final sub-question concerning the importance of authenticity in Greek food experiences for a traveler is that authenticity is of great importance in Greek food experiences, as it can be used to create feelings therefore, the participants are immersed in the experiences and from there memorable memories are created.

Concluding with the response to the main question of this research regarding the overall perception of travellers about authenticity in Greek food tourism, the thoughts of food travellers about the authenticity of Greek food experiences constitute the educational part, thinking that during their stay in Greece they will have the opportunity to discover different things about the food, the history and even the culture of local communities. In addition, another factor they have in mind when travelling to Greece for food tourism is the warmth and hospitality of locals, thus familiarising them with the place they have visited.

## 6.2 Recommendations and Future Research Ideas

Readers, researchers, and non-researchers alike, reading this thesis will then be in the delightful state of understanding the perceptions and mindset of food tourism travellers. Apart from the knowledge part, which is very crucial as they will enrich their awareness with new and innovative ideas, they will be able to take this research one step further and benefit from it. Future researchers could utilize this extracted data as a reference for future dissertation/research on a Greek food tourism and more specifically for the viewpoints of a traveler.

Furthermore, it would be very interesting for future researchers to have a deeper analysis of the data collected as Greek food tourism is growing and evolving more and more and the level of interest in it is increasing rapidly. There is a lot of information and a lot of research on this type of tourism (food tourism) but there was a gap in terms of its authenticity and its relationship with travellers. This research has filled these gaps, but the author believes that there is still a place for more and wider analysis, which will be of great interest to the world of researchers and lovers of Greek food tourism.

In addition, people with enterprises and companies involved in food and food tourism in general, could take as much knowledge as possible from this research and apply it to their businesses. Thus, it would lead to greater satisfaction from their guests, higher recognition and one of the most valuable effects of this would be an increase in their profits. They will have the tools ready for the better operation and development of their business and the only thing they will have to do is to study well this research, which is based on authenticity in Greek food tourism, so that they will have fully comprehend it and then they will be able to apply them in the best and most effective way.

### **6.3 Ethical Considerations and Reliability**

According to Arifin "The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study" and should be respected by anyone initiating research and involving individuals to derive results. Furthermore, the interview process required the consent of the participants. This involved a full analysis on the part of the author to ensure a meaningful understanding of what exactly they were being asked to answer, therefore they had a free choice whether to participate or not (Arifin 2018). Some other considerations to be considered regarding the ethical part of research are to keep the anonymity of the participants and thus give them a sense of security. Moreover, their words must not be distorted and must be conveyed in the right way in the research. In addition, their opinions should not be influenced by other considerations of interest and the independence of the researcher should be clear. Last and most important of all, the safety of the participants must be emphasized and should not put at risk for any reason whatsoever (Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza 2023). It should be

noted that in this research the ethical part was respected by the author and it was an experience that benefited even the respondents and they learned new insights during the interviews process.

Regarding the reliability of the research is very essential and the author aimed the research to be as reliable as possible so he selected participants relevant with the Greek food tourism so he can accomplish reliable responses. Research can be assessed as good or poor by reliability and fellow researchers can assure the findings as credible and trustworthy (Brink 1993). According Joppe (2000) reliability defines as "The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable".

The research has been conducted in a manner that is considered reliable. This is reflected in the quality of the sources and methods used and that from the beginning to the conclusion all have been carried out meticulously and thoroughly.

## **6.4 Learning Outcomes**

This research was very intriguing and with some difficulties, satisfactory outcomes were achieved that could be used in the future by other researchers in the field of Greek food tourism. From his point of view, if the author could change one thing, it would be the way of selecting the interviewees as he had a tough time finding reliable participants. Several times, no one would stop to answer and those bystanders who did have difficulties in responding. It would be better if there were already known participants prepared for such an interview.

With the completion of this thesis the author was very satisfied as he benefited to the maximum from this process. The topic was challenging and confronted multiples difficulties regarding the production of results but in the end, all was done successfully. He was given the opportunity to learn many new insights that he did know before in the field of Greek food tourism as he himself is passionate for the Greek food tourism and working in the restaurant and hotel industry enhanced his thinking way and be much more ready for the better assistance and comprehension of his guests. Moreover, by this learning process he can be assisted in the future for a higher academic degree. This process required writing and research skills. With the completion of thesis both academic writing and thinking were developed and strengthened and he became an accomplished researcher who from here on can much more easily write similar extensive writing works.

There have been many moments when the author understood that had to take a step back and it does not mean to keep writing in a choppy way to finish faster. The purpose and the proper approach are to take a step back to look at the big picture of what has been written up to that point, to comprehend it fully and then by organizing it correctly and thoughtfully based on the guidance to move on.

Overall, it was a difficult, time-consuming but at the same time enjoyable educational process. He had excellent guidance and assistance from his supervisor who, with appropriate meetings when needed, guided the author in developing new ideas and how a thesis should be properly structured. The corrections were always effectively helping the author being on the right path of the process and with an encouraging attitude on the side of the author boosting his personality improving for a better outcome. Through the help of the supervisor the desired result was achieved.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

- 1) Can you describe a memorable Greek food tourism experience where you felt a strong sense of authenticity?
- 2) What does the term authenticity mean to you in the context of Greek food tourism?
- 3) How significant is the food authenticity to the success of a travel destination?
- 4) In your opinion what elements contribute to the authenticity of food tourism experience?
- 5) Does interacting with locals or food habits have an impact on authenticity?
- 6) How do you define authenticity in Greek food tourism?
- 7) How significant food authenticity is considered for a traveler?