

Anastasiia Olegovna Vasylchenko

Polessky State University, Economic Faculty, Pinsk, Republic of Belarus

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8969-6611>

e-mail: vasilchenko.2012@inbox.ru

State and prospects of development of food tourism in the Republic of Belarus

Abstract: The article discusses the main factors influencing the development of food tourism in the world and, specifically, in the Republic of Belarus. It touches upon the objects of food tourism, its target audience, classification of tourist types according to gastronomic tourism, as well as types of gastronomic tours and routes. The author briefly presents the regions where the development of gastronomic tourism is viable and describes unique food and drink recipes, the preparation of which is exclusively characteristic of the national cuisine of the Republic of Belarus. The key aspects concerning the development of gastronomic tourism in the Republic of Belarus are discussed, namely: available master classes and tastings, appearance, development, as well as implementation of projects pertaining to gastronomic tourism, such as, among others, “Bella Cuisine”, “Syrnaya Lavka” from Slavgorod cheese makers, “Mukhovetska Kumora” in Kobrin. Also, the author provides a culinary map of the Republic of Belarus supplemented with the description of individual regions and national dishes. Lastly, the paper offers some recommendations for improving the development of food tourism in the Republic of Belarus. Food tourism reveals the authenticity of the destination region through culinary art, which allows a foreigner to plunge into the old traditions and life of Belarusians, to feel the atmosphere of hospitality and see the unique local, natural, historical, cultural and environmental facilities.

Keywords: culinary tourism, recipes, national dishes, traditions and culture, green tourism.

1. Introduction

Gastronomic tourism is a rather promising direction in the development of tourism, but as a large-scale phenomenon it still does not exist in the Republic of Belarus. The history of tourism has more than one hundred years. Currently, one may distinguish a large number of its types and directions. Gastronomic tourism, which has recently been of particular interest to many tourists, is becoming very popular in many countries, including Belarus's neighbours and other nearby countries of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Steshenko and Parfinenko, 2012; Matlovičová and Pompura, 2013; Burneika et al. 2015; Charzyński et al. 2017; Kiráľová and Hamarneh, 2017). According to UNWTO forecasts, food tourism will prove to be one of the most popular types of tourism in 2020, and it is already actively developing. According to the information contained in the Global Report on

Food Tourism by G. Richards (2012), Europe is one of the most popular area of tourism development. First, according to research, Europe is the leading region in terms of the number of tourists visiting. It is here that a huge number of cultural and historical monuments are concentrated, and in addition, the industry service is at a high level. Second, Europe has historically been the world's largest producer and exporter of high-quality wines due to its geographical, climatic, environmental, cultural and political conditions. Tourists are attracted to this region not only by European cuisine, but also by numerous tastings and national holidays associated with the collection of grapes. The Republic of Belarus is geographically part of Europe, but the culinary tourism is still at its early development stage. The degree of scientific considerations on the research topic in question is extremely low, and

very few Belarusian authors have published their studies in relation to food tourism. However, in recent years, the trends of tourism development in Belarus indicate an increase in the number of both regional and international culinary master-classes, festivals and events. Belarusian cuisine is considered similar to Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish ones, but it is also unique, extremely hearty and delicious in its

own way. There are plenty of dishes and drinks that are available only in this country and could impress even the most demanding gourmet.

The study aims to identify and evaluate the key aspects pertaining to the prospective development of food tourism in the Republic of Belarus, taking into consideration both current and future trends in this field.

2. Methods and material studied

The following scientists were engaged in research on tourism and its types, and food tourism in particular: Chernukh (2002), Sycheva and Shpenkova (2014), Butsenko (2015), Dracheva and Hristov (2015), Zelenskaya (2015). Most of the researchers who tackle the subject matter are of Russian nation-

ality (e.g. Ermolaev et al., 2019). In Belarus, on the other hand, the concept of culinary tourism has attracted little to no attention.

Methods used in this study include theoretical approach, methods of analysis and synthesis, classification, statistical research methods as well as the method of analogy.

3. Results and analyses

The main indicators of tourism development in the Republic of Belarus in the period of 2011–2017 point to a considerable increase in tourist flow to the country, although outbound tourism continues to prevail for the time being. The number of tourists travelling abroad grew by 127.5% compared to the year 2011 and amounted to 727 536 people. The number of foreign tourists visiting the Republic of Belarus increased by 143.6% in relation to 2011, which translates into 282 694 people (Tourism and tourism resources in the Republic of Belarus. Statistical compendium. Ministry of statistics and analysis of the Republic of Belarus, https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/index_9294/). These indicators show the ratio of more than 2 outbound tourists per 1 inbound visitor.

As far as gastronomic tourism is concerned, its development is mostly predicated on agroecotourist entities, whose number is growing by the year (in comparison with 2011 it increased by 47.1% and amounted to 2319 units), as well as the number of tourists served (compared to 2011 it increased by 142.3% and amounted to 351.1 thousand people). This is presented in Figure 1.

The term culinary tourism was coined in 1998 by Lucy Long, Associate Professor of folk culture at Bowling Green State University in the USA. In 2001, Erik Wolf wrote the world's first article on culinary tourism. In 2003 he founded the International Culinary Tourism Association and has been its president to this day (Butsenko, 2015).

The International Tourism Association continues to emphasize the importance of gastronomic tourism as a highly profitable segment of the economy. Food in local cafés and restaurants belongs to one of the three most important forms of tourists' leisure (along with sightseeing and shopping) (Belarusian tourism, Byfin.by – Financial portal).

Many factors have recently contributed to the emergence and development of gastronomic tourism in the world (Sycheva and Shpenkova, 2014):

- growing worldwide popularity of TV cooking programs and shows;
- acquisition of the world's best restaurants by chefs;
- emergence of restaurant business fashion: visiting trendy gastropubs maintains image and status in society;

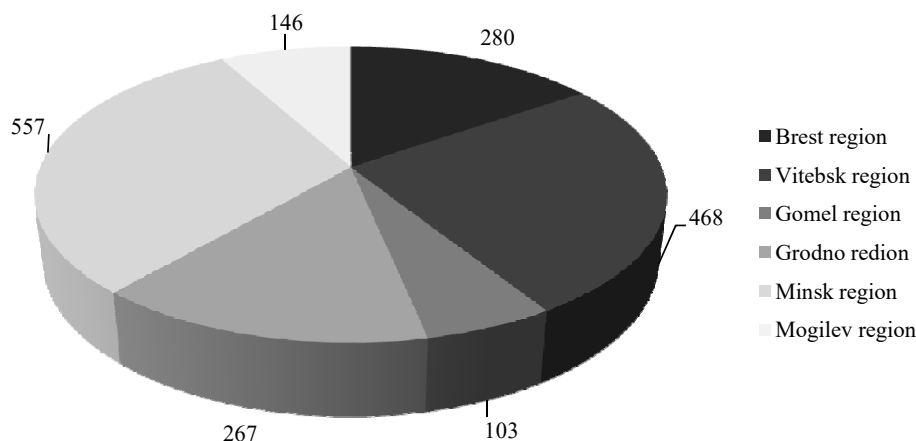


Figure 1. Number of agroecotourist entities in the Republic of Belarus by regions in 2017 (source: prepared based on Tourism and tourism resources in the Republic of Belarus. Statistical compendium. Ministry of statistics and analysis of the Republic of Belarus (https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/index_9294/))

- accessibility, familiarity and routine of visiting restaurants for people experienced in nutrition;
- public concern about environmental issues and food quality;
- increased costs of food and recreation as a result of rising incomes of the population;
- growing popularity of healthy lifestyle;
- awareness of considerable potential and profitability demonstrated by gastronomic tourism in the world on the part of food production enterprises and tourist organizations.

The 2013 study called “The American Culinary Traveler Report”, published by Mandala Research, indicates a more than ten percent increase in culinary tourism from 2006 to 2013. These statistics account for American tourists only. Gastronomic tourism globally nets \$150 billion a year, according to the International Association of Gastronomic Tourism (Bon Appetit: The Rise of the cultural Traveler, 2016).

The gastronomic destinations are as follows (Dracheva and Hristov, 2015):

1. Countries whose cuisine is highly popular in the world (France, Italy, Spain, Japan, China);
2. Regions famous for their food products (for example, Bordeaux, Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne in France, included in the Appellation d’Origine Controle classification, known for their unique wines; cheeses

made in the Dutch cities of Gouda and Edam);

3. Cities with special cuisine (New York, London, Paris, Tokyo, Rome, Brussels, Hong Kong, Barcelona, etc.);
4. Individual restaurants distinguished by the quality and exclusivity of their cuisine and original menu (holders of three Michelin Restaurant Guide stars: “La Pergola” in Rome, Italy, “Fat Duck” in the town of Bray, Great Britain, “Koju” in Tokyo, Japan);
5. Companies known for their culinary products (for example, the world’s largest chocolate factory Alprose in Switzerland and the famous monastery breweries Andex and Ettal located in Upper Bavaria, Germany);
6. Institutions providing educational services in the field of culinary and gastronomy (French Academy of Culinary Arts “La Cordon Bleu”, Italian Cuisine High School);
7. Culinary events: festivals, fairs, holidays, tastings, master-classes, exhibitions, conferences.

The most famous culinary festivals in Belarus are fruit and berry festivals. Fruits occur in national Belarusian dishes in fresh, boiled and dried form. Wine and liqueurs are often made from berries, and they are used in the preparation of meat and sauces (“luninetskaya strawberry” in Luninets, “Cherry festival” in Glubokoe, eco-festival of blueberry in Polotsk).

Rural festivals are also gaining in popularity, reviving the Belarusian tradition of celebrating the harvest day in the process. Tourists are invited to the fair, treated to the most delicious and fresh vegetables, fruits, meat and fish, and the hostesses share their recipes. Events in question include: Motol agro-town, “Motal-skiya prysmaki” festival of culinary skills, “Gaspadarchy Syr” festival in Slavgorod, meat festival in Logoisk.

The target audience of gastronomic tours involves (Gastrotourism, Gastronomic tourism, 2019):

- gourmet tourists for whom a good meal is something more than just food;
- tourists wishing to join the culture of the country through its national cuisine;
- tourists using a gastronomic tour for training and gaining professional skills (cooks, restaurateurs, sommeliers, tasters, restaurant critics);
- representatives of travel companies seeking to expand their business and start selling gastronomic tours.

The authors identify four types of tourists in terms of gastronomy:

1. The existential gastronomy tourist is in search of gastronomic experiences in order to learn local and regional cuisine and culture. They avoid well-known trendy restau-

rants and prefer to visit farms, participate in cooking master-classes, etc;

2. In line with trends of foos tourism development the experimental gastronomy tourist looks for designer cafés and restaurants serving innovative dishes, their gastronomic preferences correspond to their overall lifestyle, which mostly reflects and taps into current trends;
3. The recreational gastronomy tourist searches for familiar foods and drinks. This is a more conservative type of travelers who often eat on their own and avoid luxurious restaurants; for them, gastronomy does not play any important role during the journey;
4. The diversionary gastronomy tourist while on a trip wants to escape from everyday life, shopping and cooking for the whole family. This type of tourist prefers simple chain restaurants, where the emphasis is not so much on the quality, but rather on the quantity of food.

This classification allows for a holistic view of tourists’ preferences in relation to food consumption during travels and is useful for the segmentation of the target audience of gastronomic enterprises (Belarus.by. Official website of the Republic of Belarus).

Gastronomic tours are divided into two types: urban and rural (“green”). The funda-

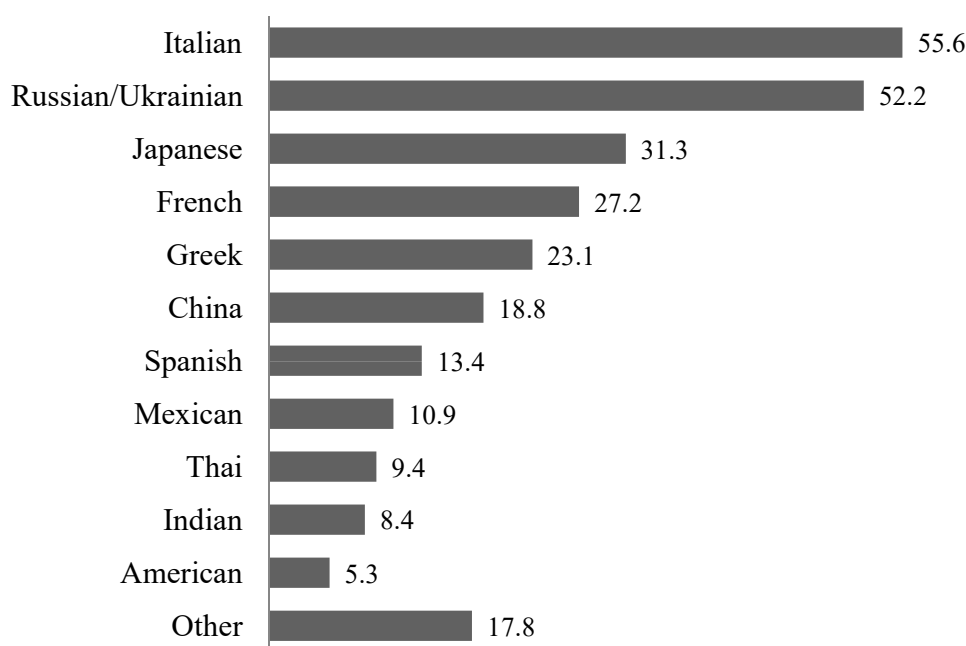


Figure 2. Preferences pertaining to national cuisines among visitors to the website abc-gid.ru (% , up to three choices) (source: prepared based on research “Have you tried crocodile?”, ABC Journal, 2009)

mental difference lies in the fact that the tourists going to the countryside seek environmentally friendly products devoid of any additives (Gastrotourism, Gastronomic tourism, 2019). In the Republic of Belarus, the second type of gastronomic tours has become widespread. "Green" tours predetermine eventful rest in agro-estates: culinary master-classes, visiting gastronomic festivals, picking fresh berries and mushrooms in the forests, fishing, horse riding, cycling and hiking. Communication with nature enhances a person's creativity and provides relaxation and recreation.

One of the most famous online hotel booking site Hotels.com, in collaboration with the

magazine "ABC", decided to establish what routes conquer not only the hearts but also the stomachs of travelers from around the world. To the question "Which national cuisine do you prefer?", with the possibility of choosing three options, most respondents answered "Italian", then "Russian / Ukrainian" (Fig. 2).

A distinctive feature of the Belarusian cuisine is a wide range of potato dishes, as well as the use of various sausages, cereals, mushrooms and pork. Since the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Slavic, Baltic, Jewish, and partly German roots have been closely intertwined in the national cuisine.

4. Discussion

Among the entire range of Belarusian national dishes and drinks, there are several that are the hallmark of the Republic of Belarus, its "culinary brand", namely (Food of the world, Portal about food, 2010):

- *draniki* – potato pancakes;
- dumplings – prepared with potatoes and minced meat, formed into balls and boiled, served with sour cream;
- potato *babka* – a dish made with grated potatoes and brisket, baked in the oven;
- *bigos* – a dish based on sauerkraut and meat;
- *machanka* – can be dairy and meat; the former is made from cottage cheese, milk and cream and is used as a kind of sauce for dipping pancakes or boiled vegetables, the latter is a variety of meat scraps that are baked and served as a separate dish;
- *holodnik* – cold vegetable soup cooked on kefir;
- *kolduny* – resembles small ravioli;
- home-made sausages;
- foreshank- part of a pork leg, cooked with special sauce;
- *knysh* – a pie with cottage cheese, jam or cracklings;
- Belarusian soured brown bread;
- *zeppelins* – potato dumplings with meat or mushrooms;
- *smazhnia* – a meat pie;
- pancakes made from oatmeal;
- *kulaga* – a sweet dish made from fresh berries.

- *krambambulia* – tincture on spices and honey;
- *zubrovka* – tincture on vodka.

While some of these dishes are also common in Poland and Lithuania, old Belarusian recipes have survived to the present day and arouse ever growing interest among those who visit the country. In restaurants with the national flavor, tourists can be offered not only traditional cuisine, but also delicious dishes that were once served at the residences of Belarusian magnates. One may also explore the national cuisine as served at agro-estates, where the freshest village products are used for cooking. It may be an opportunity to, for instance, bake bread according to old recipes and methods, cook homemade meat delicacies, make cheese from cow's or goat's milk, or try sweets made with honey, apples and cranberries (Belarus.by. Official website of the Republic of Belarus).

Unique dishes and recipes preserved from the ancient times are on the list of intangible heritage of the Republic of Belarus. One of them is an Easter dish, *butter ram*, which reflects over 200 years of history. Ram is prepared with homemade oil, cooked in a wooden churn, with salt. Butter is squeezed through two layers of gauze to imitate curly "ram's wool". The tradition of cooking this dish is recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. The dish is common in the Glubokoe district of the Vitebsk region.

Rye bread is a unique recipe preserved in the Vitebsk region. The recipe for yeast-free rye bread has been around for several centuries. Its main secret lies in a special sourdough of rye flour and water. Women make such bread on a maple leaf, sometimes add lard, sausage or an egg. The tradition of baking rye bread is also recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage.

Gastronomic tourism as a large-scale phenomenon in the Republic of Belarus does not exist as of yet. Master-classes and tastings of national dishes are held in the museum complex "Dudutki" and the estate "Martinova Gus" in the Minsk region, as well as the estate "Svitizyanka" in the Grodno region. In terms of prospective development, it is worth mentioning projects such as "Bella Cuisine", "Syrnaya Lavka" from Slavgorod cheese makers, "Mukhovetska Kumora" in Kobrin to name a few (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Butsenko, 2015).

"Mukhovetska Kumora" is an agrotourist cluster that brings together a number of estates in the Kobrin and Zhabinka districts, as well as tourist complexes, craft clubs, military historical reconstruction clubs in the region, folk groups, mass media representatives and other active, creative individuals. The cluster was created by the public Council for the Development of Agroecotourism in the Kobrin district of the Brest region in November 2012. The organization of the strategic planning process for tourist destinations was carried out within the framework of the USAID project "Local Entrepreneurship and Economic Development", implemented by the UN Development Program. "Mukhovetska Kumora" (Mukhovetska Kumora). Destination of "Mukhovetska Kumora". Agrotourism in Belarus), aside from weekend tours, water and bicycle routes, children's and ceremonial holidays, offers a gastronomic tour known as "Paleskiya Prysmaki" for groups of tourists counting twenty to fifty people, and also organizes craft and culinary master-classes (Belarusian news).

The Home Cheese Creation Center project won the local initiatives competition in the international technical assistance project "Promotion of Local Development in the Republic of Belarus", executed by the Ministry of Economy and implemented by the UN Development Program funded by the European Union.

About 18 thousand euros was allocated from the EU funds for these purposes. Home-made cheeses have been sold in the town of Slavgorod in the Mogilev region since 2016. Currently, the aforementioned town offers an outlet, master-classes, animation programs and tours for tourists. The President of Belarus, UN representatives and the French delegation were treated to Slavgorod cheeses – the cheeses received the highest ratings. These days, efforts are focused on establishing exhibition devoted to the history of Slavgorod cheese in the "Syrnaya Lavka" (Maslenitsa lives under the Columns...).

The "Bella Cuisine" project – a network of culinary heritage of the Vitebsk region – aimed to systematize available information pertaining to the culinary offer, advertising materials, as well as a tourist routes featuring the most popular sites in selected regions of Belarus and Latvia. The program had a budget of 483.195 thousand euros and was carried out over a period of 18 months with the support of the European Union, which contributed 90% of its value. The total annual contribution from the region is 1000 euros. In the case of the Vitebsk region, the membership agreement was signed by the representatives of the regional Executive Committee. Subsequently, the initiative was joined by estates, cafés and other catering enterprises. From 2014 to 2015, two complete test tours were conducted along with visits to gastronomic sites in the Verkhnedvinsk, Polotsk, Miory, Lepel and Glubokoe districts, as well as the Latgale district of Eastern Latvia. A full tour takes two days and involves visiting 25 agro-estates and local enterprises. As part of the tour, tourists may not only taste products and dishes of national cuisine, but also visit interesting historical places: cathedrals, churches, museums and arboretums. Each estate offers lunch or dinner, and often a short tour, which is typically quite inexpensive – with prices starting at two euros per person (Butsenko, 2015).

One of the building blocks in the foundation of the emerging domestic gastronomic tourism was the route "Savour of the Belarusian Village", which invites tourists to visit the Stolbtsy region and taste traditional peasant cuisine of the Central region of the country. During the trip, the participants of the gastronomic tour are told how the national culinary traditions were formed and can experience delicious

Belarusians dishes commonly prepared and appreciated in the villages. The tourist recreation complex employs talented artists-animators. Moreover, it offers a master-class on cooking and provides various forms of entertainment, including traditional singing and dances. Visitors are then invited to enjoy a local meal (Maslenitsa lives under the Columns...).

The Belarusian public association "Rest in the Village" has proposed a more ambitious project, which received the name "Gastiniya". Experts in the field of culinary, history and tourism joined their efforts to create a guidebook to old Belarusian cuisine. The project involves several hundred unique recipes. Its comple-

tion required checking more than 200 places of their preparation and covering a distance of 400 thousand kilometers, which spanned over more than 10 years of data collection, including five expeditions to the regions with students of the History Department at the Belarusian State University.

In 2016, a paper version of the culinary map of the Republic of Belarus was published (Belarusian portal TUT.BY-2000). It indicates dishes considered typical of the regions of Belarus, and accounts for objects and estates that tourists may wish to visit (Fig. 3). The project gained its own identity owing to its logo: spoon and fork stylized as an ornament.



Figure 3. Food map of Belarus (Belarusian portal TUT.BY-2000)

5. Conclusions

The development of gastronomic tourism in the Republic of Belarus requires a number of components, including:

- creative ideas for organizing various events (festivals, holidays, tastings, master-classes) and their large-scale promotion among potential and real target audience of tourists;

- developed infrastructure enabling high-quality service to tourists (including foreign);
- qualified personnel who speaks several foreign languages;
- a comprehensive tourist product that reflects the local flavor and combines gastronomic, eventful and cultural-cognitive components;

- due to the increase in tourist flow to the Republic of Belarus and the expansion of the geography of visitors, it is necessary to take into account the cultural, religious and historical aspects when providing a tourist service;
 - a growth in the number of car rental companies and their geographical concentration.
- All of the above determines the necessity of the development of food tourism. It reveals the authenticity of the destination region through culinary art, which will allow a foreigner to plunge into the old traditions and life of the Belarusians, to feel the atmosphere of hospitality and see the unique local natural, historical, cultural and environmental facilities.

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