

# FOOD FESTIVALS IN TAMILNADU THROUGH EVENT TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

**Dr. A. Apsara Saleth Mary**

*Faculty, Centre for Tourism and Hotel Management,  
Madurai Kamaraj University  
Palkalai Nagar, Madurai – 625 021.*

**Abstract** - In the rapidly changing global economic scenario, tourism is considered to be one of the largest and fast growing industries. Tourism has been a key force in promoting events; their growth and expansion. Destinations are increasingly keen to share their attractions, culture and environment with visitors by promoting a variety of planned events. Food festivals serve as important attractors for destinations, because they can provide unique experience for attendees. Rural communities are using food festivals to promote local delicacies, especially when the names of a particular place or region have been put together with the products. It has become widely accepted that every community and destination needs to adopt a long-term, strategic approach to event tourism. This has given rise to the opportunity of planning, organizing and managing development specifically tourism development in order to realize the full tourism potential of events as well as the destinations. India is one of the major destinations of the foreign tourists for the reason of unique culture and hospitality, in particularly the state of Tamil Nadu has a rich cultural heritage among the Indian states. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of events tourism through food festivals and how destinations can use food tourism as a tourism product. The paper also suggests important measures to promote event tourism through food festivals in the state of Tamil Nadu and to tap its potential properly.

**Intex Terms** - Food tourism; food festivals and events; travel motivations

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism today is paradoxical. It simultaneously generates processes of globalization and enhanced appreciation of local resources. Tourism destinations obliged to maintain increasingly intense competitiveness and engaged in a constant struggle to retain some of their market, face an increasingly dynamic and sophisticated environment. The world is increasingly open; however, tourists seek experiences based on local identity and culture and in this endeavor the gastronomic experience, in highly diverse ways, is playing an increasingly prominent part.

Gastronomic tourism is an emerging phenomenon that is being developed as a new tourism product due, inter alia, to the fact that according to the specialized literature (among others, Quan and Wang, 2004) over a third of tourist spending is devoted to food. Therefore, **the cuisine of the destination is an aspect of utmost importance in the quality of the holiday experience.**

During the last two decades, the number of sports and cultural events designed to attract tourists to every corner of the globe has multiplied many times (MacPherson, 1997; Flognfeldt, 1999; Gelan, 2003; Wood, 2005; Williams and Bowdin, 2007; Jackson, 2008). More recently, cities and towns have added events such as exhibitions, crafts expos, themed markets, festivals, food festivals and fairs to their traditional offerings (monuments, museums, mountains, for example) to attract more tourists and lengthen their stays. Event tourism is an important motivator of tourism; they can attract tourists and visitors, both national and international.

### 1.2 Event Tourism

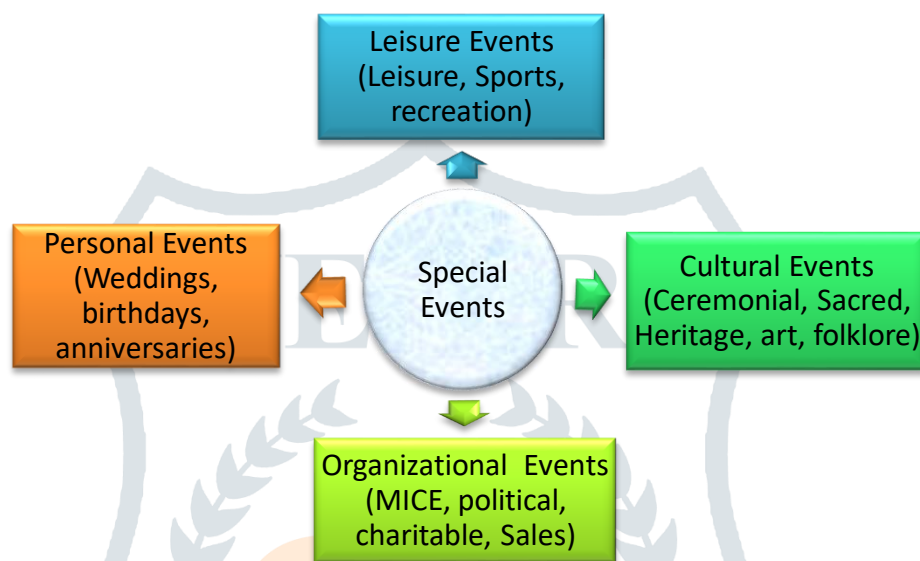
“*Event tourism*” was a new term introduced in the 1980’s, but it has become firmly established as a major component of special interest tourism and a significant ingredient in destination marketing strategies. According to Getz (1997) events have during the last decade become an important means for communities and tourist regions to gain advantage and meet a variety of economic, social and environmental goals. Due to the increased competitiveness among tourist destinations, the pursuit and development of events has become big business (Getz, 2004b).

### 1.2.1. Definition of Special Event

Getz (1997) has defined a special event as a "One time or infrequently occurring event outside the normal program or activities of the sponsoring or organizing body". "It is an opportunity for leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experiences". It is important to note that, Festivals are held annually whereas a special event is usually a one time performance at the destination. Moreover, festival provides the public to participate in the experience where as in a special event the public is an observer or a spectator to the experience of the performers.

### 1.2.2. Types of Special Events

The types of special events are distinguished below:-



Source: du Rand, Heath and Alberts (2003, p. 74).

Fig 1: Classification of Special Events

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For many years, the common understanding of the role of food in relation to tourism was through the provision of food for travelers. However, more recently food has been recognized as a major component of the tourism product.

One of the most utilized definitions of Gastronomic tourism used in the literature is that proposed by Hall and Sharples (2003), according to which food tourism is an experiential trip to a gastronomic region, for recreational or entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers' markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food. In addition, this experiential journey is related to a particular lifestyle that includes experimentation, learning from different cultures, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the qualities or attributes related to tourism products, as well as culinary specialties produced in that region through its consumption. Thus, the experience of gastronomic tourism is considered as such, provided that everything mentioned above constitutes the main reason or motivation to travel for visitors to a particular destination or at least one significant reason.

The concept of food associated with tourism has evolved from general roots in traditional hospitality into the new concept of "food tourism", where food has become increasingly important in promoting tourism destination (Jones and Jenkins, 2002).

According to Hall and Mitchell (2001), food tourism is defined as "a 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" (p. 308). Food has therefore developed from being a basic necessity for tourist consumption to being regarded as an essential element of regional culture that tourists consume (Jones and Jenkins, 2002). The very nature of the food industry lends

itself to a marriage with tourism (Cela, Knowles-Lankford, & Lankford, 2007). It is apparent that food tourism has considerable potential to enhance visitor experiences and to contribute to the competitive marketing of destinations.

A review of fairly extensive tourism literature found little research specifically related to food tourism. The linkages that exist between food and tourism have started to form an increasing academic debate in recent years. Reynolds (1993) examined the importance of preserving traditional foods as an essential part of sustainable tourism. Telfer and Wall (1996) discussed the relationships between food production and tourism ranging from the conflict over competition for land, labor and capital to a symbiosis where both sectors mutually benefit from each other. Cohen and Avieli (2004) stressed the complications and impediments experienced by the tourists in unfamiliar culinary situations at their destinations.

All the studies have tended to strengthen arguments for the regional development of food tourism and to suggest that food tourism is becoming an important means of providing new tourism products that sell the distinct character and culture of a destination (Jones & Jenkins, 2002). According to Pyo, Uysal, & McLellan, (1991) tourists not only spend a substantial amount of their total expenditure on food, it is also the least likely activity for tourists to cut costs on. In addition, Enteleca Research and Consultancy (2001) reported 67% of holiday makers to the UK were prepared to pay more for quality food and drink and that between 32% and 66% of tourists either buy or consume local foods during their visit. Food fulfils a functional need of tourists; hence it consists of a considerable part of tourism expenditure in both individual and organized travel (Jones & Jenkins, 2002, p. 115).

Hall and Mitchell (2005, p. 74) point out that this does not mean that any restaurant experience when travelling can be considered as food tourism, rather, the desire to experience the food, dish or cuisine must be the major motivation for the visit. In the above definition a distinction is made between “tourists who consume food as part of the travel experience, and those whose activities, behaviours, and even destination selection is influenced by an interest in food”.

## 2.1 RESEARCH GAP

The studies listed here have not covered the area focused in this paper namely food tourism in TamilNadu. Hence, the paper approaches a potential area for research and development for the purpose of tourism.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Assess the current role of food festivals in tourism in Tamil Nadu.
2. Identify barriers that restrict the linkage of local food and tourism in Tamil Nadu.
3. Identify ways in which local food can be used to strengthen and sustain regional competitiveness in the district of Tamil Nadu.

### IV. FOOD, TOURISM AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The promotion of food in tourism is seen as one way of developing the distinctiveness and identity of a region while retaining and maximising the benefits of visitor spend to the region's economy and local communities (Hall and Sharples, 2003, p. 6). Du Rand, Heath and Alberts (2003, p.100) outline ways in which local food may directly or indirectly contribute to sustainable local development (see Figure 2), these contributions include enhancing destination attractiveness, empowerment through local job creation and entrepreneurship (for example, developing artisan food products), regional brand identification, authentic presentation of the local culture, stimulation of agricultural activity, and generation of pride in the region.

Central to this sustainable development model is the maximisation of linkages to local communities through the integration of local supply networks into the tourism system. For example, the promotion of regional cuisine and local food supports and strengthens the tourism and agricultural sectors of local economies by:



Source: du Rand, Heath and Alberts (2003, p. 100).

**Figure 2: The contribution of local food to sustainable development within a destination**

Locally produced food provides the connection between tourism and other economic sectors such as fishing, aquaculture, horticulture and agriculture (Santich, 2007; Eastham, 2003). From this it can be seen that linking food and tourism adds to rural diversity. These industries, along with food production and service, are generally labour intensive, and so their enhancement through linkages with the tourism industry will result in increased employment opportunities for local people. They are also sustainable industries and so their use will, in turn, promote sustainable food systems as the demand for imported produce is reduced (Tao and Wall, 2009). The use of local food also encourages entrepreneurship; for example, through the development of artisan food products.

Hall and Mitchell (2002, pp. 83–84) have identified key ways in which food may be integrated into a regional strategy for local economic development. The authors suggest ‘buy local’ campaigns for goods and services to recycle financial resources. For example, restaurants need to purchase and promote local foods and wine. In this way local food can be used as a tourist attraction and also income generated remains in the local economy rather than being lost to economic leakage, which occurs when produce is purchased from out of region. Generally, large hotels are vital to the local economy in terms of employment; however, their lack of ‘buy local’ policy does little to impact positively on the local multiplier. Purchasing from local food suppliers would add more value within the region. In this case the primary concern of the hotel stakeholders in the provision of food is their cost and profit margins. Given that Rotorua is highly dependent on international hotel chains for local employment.

It is also possible to add value to local produce before it is exported by bottling and packaging food locally rather than relying on central distribution centers and standardised packaging. By listing the place of origin on the label, local identity and authenticity are emphasised. Connecting up local stakeholders create new linkages and stronger community partnerships. For example, local farmers and producers’ cooperatives provide an extra outlet for produce and also enable direct sales and contact with customers. The use of external resources such as the Internet enables contact with customers outside the region. The relationship between food and tourism presents significant opportunities for sustainable rural development; in particular, linking the two can create jobs and increase sales of local produce, as well as create interrelationships, linkages and networks between stakeholders.

A variety of relationships between national, regional and local food, and tourism and regional development strategies is presented by Hall et al., (2003, p. 58). The authors argue that an integrated approach between national, regional and local stakeholders provides the best mechanism for the implementation of tourism strategies that incorporate food in regional development. At a national level, for example, food export and tourism promotions are seen as ideal partners in joint marketing activities. United under one image and centered on ‘place’, brands are an important means of differentiation and added value for regions (Hall, 2004). For example,

national images are a key feature of national branding strategies. The 'Fern' brand and logo has been registered by New Zealand in forty-four countries around the world.

Food and tourism are differentiated on the basis of regional identity. Associated regional branding provides an important means of product promotion and, as a consequence, economic development. Hall et al. (2003, p. 33) recognise that critical to the success of regional development strategies is the advancement of intangible capital assets such as knowledge, relationships, reputation and people. However, "intangible assets only create value when captured as intellectual property, networks, brand, and talent." It is then that they "provide the basis for the success of linking food and tourism as a regional development strategy" (Hall et al., 2003, p. 33; Hall, 2004).

## V. TAMILNADU CUISINE

Tourism in TamilNadu showcases the richness of culture of Tamils. It may be noted that Culture of a destination is expressed through the expression of art, architecture, dance, drama, music and food. Food, for every reason is the basis for anyone's well-being. The taste of the food also tracks to the destination of that food. Hence, it will provide an opportunity to delight the visitors with a good food and use it for the promotion of TamilNadu Food and Tourism into the World arena.

Indian cuisines are classified according to the religions, their community, climate, season and the raw-material available. Every state of India has its own taste quarters formulated with more than one types of cuisine; the state of TamilNadu is no exception. There are regional sub-varieties namely *Chettinad*, *Kongunadu*, Madurai, Tirunelveli varieties and so on. In the case of Chennai, the capital of TamilNadu state, it has evolved into a cosmopolitan city. Therefore, its cuisine is unique and multifaceted. Chennai is multi-religious and a centre of multi-communities. Its cuisine is influenced by Andhra cuisine, Karnataka Cuisine and Kerala Cuisine. In this respect it may be referred as Pallava Cuisine with due respect to the Pallava Kingdom who have created a world wonder through the monolithic sculpture at Mamallapuram. It is felt that the typical TamilNadu cuisine that can be incorporated to the aspect of Culinary Tourism are that of *Kongu* Cuisine that evolves from the western part of TamilNadu namely Coimbatore, *Pandya* Cuisine that originates from the southern part of TamilNadu namely Madurai and *Chettinad* Cuisine that encompasses the eastern part of the state covering the regions of Karaikudi.

## VI. FOOD FESTIVALS

A food festival is a festival; that is organised to exhibit and experience the varieties of food available in that destination. It is usually held annually along with the harvest time in Europe and United States of America. It also has a central theme. "These festivals have always been a means of uniting communities through celebrations of harvests and giving thanks for a plentiful growing season. They can be traced back thousands of years to celebrating the arrival of harvest time, the autumnal equinox, and the honoring of earth gods."

### 6.1. International

The Taste of Chicago (mostly known as The Taste) is the world's largest food festival, held annually in mid-July in Chicago in Grant Park. The event is the largest festival in Chicago. Arnie Morton is the creator of the event. He decided to line up Chicago restaurants to participate and persuaded then-mayor Jane Byrne and Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Lois Weisberg to block off Michigan Avenue for the first Taste of Chicago on July 4, 1980. Of the 100,000 people the organizers expected, over 250,000 showed up, with food and soda sales grossing \$300,000 at its inception. The next year, the Taste of Chicago was moved to Grant Park and grew in size and scope, becoming a 10-day event with more food vendors and musical performers; it also became the world's largest food festival.

In 2005, the Taste attracted about 3.5 million people with over 70 food vendors. Foods at the event include Chicago-style pizza, Chicago hot dogs, barbecued ribs, Italian Beef, Maxwell Street Polish Sausage, Eli's Cheesecake, and a variety of ethnic and regional foods. Keshawn Charles Altman A record total of 3.6 million people visited the 2006 Taste of Chicago. Attendance for the previous record 10-day event, in 2004, was 3.59 million, with \$12.33 million in revenue.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taste\\_of\\_Chicago](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taste_of_Chicago)

## 6.2. National

These Food Festivals picked up ground in the early 80's in Europe and USA, it has now become a regular event for the Capital of India, New Delhi also. The fourth edition of the Delhi Food Festival was held in New Delhi between 27 and 29 December 2013. Named as the 'Dilli ke Pakwaan' food festival on Baba Kharak Singh Marg in Delhi saw a large crowds swarming in at the emporia hub of the city to get a taste of the plethora of delicacies on offer. The newly-appointed Minister of Tourism, Art and Culture, Administrative Reforms and Law, Somnath Bharti, visited the venue of Dilli Ke Pakwaan and applauded Delhi Tourism's effort in making this festival a grand success.

The festival had vendors from Purani Dilli who showcased their expertise in crafting some of the most delectable, mouth-watering cuisines. This year, there were more than 150 varieties of food on offer for the visitors. Theme corners were also set up where visitors were able to enjoy delicacies and also get a vivid glimpse of culture and tradition. Interactive sessions on cooking, besides various competitions for the visitors, such as best recipe, were also held during the week-long festival. A special kid's zone drew a lot of attention with various competitions like Quiz Contest and painting competition attracting children of all ages.

The cultural programmes and music performances added colour to the event. The last day of the event saw a performance by singer Neeraj Bakshi. Over 3 lakh foodies visited the venue of Dilli Ke Pakwaan over a period of seven days.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.3. State

Chennai Posted its Food Festival, named as 'Masala Kart', from 02 Aug 2013 to 04 2013 on Island Grounds dishing out delicacies of almost all South Indian Taste through 120 stalls and cooks from around the country. The festival had everything from MLA pesarattu to malpua, from putharekulu to haleem. Last year, the fest was held on Elliot's beach, but this year, they have more food, more space, and more importantly more car parking, said Vinod Gopal, CEO, Red Chariots, which is organising the fest. The organisers have roped in people from Udipi, Jammu, Chandigarh, Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai, Pune, Vijaywada, Rajahmundry, Mysore and Tirunelveli among other places. There's paranthas from Paranthi Wali Gali and halwa from Tirunelveli.

The festive mood among the participants is to be seen to believe, it was absolute gala that has brought in the true colour of India, "Unity in Diversity".<sup>3</sup> It was such a wonder that the presentation of food was coupled with the culture of the food variety such as the Food of Kerala was served by people in Kerala attire and the Bengali food was dished out with Bengal Cotton Saree clad ladies. Thus, the taste also brings out the touch of tourism destinations too. These food festivals are certainly a great opportunities for tourism in the country with so much to offer for the gourmets delights.

## VII. OPPORUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR FOOD FESTIVALS

This section provides the opportunities and challenges for food festivals

### 7.1. Opportunities

1. Food Festivals are events that can be organised at any time of the year, so they can make tourism Round - the-year from a seasonal event with wide variety of experts in one location.
2. Food Festivals bring in an opportunity of related events such as dance, music and drama both in Classical and folk format as a source of entertainment.
3. Food Festivals can be clubbed with any form of tourism right from historical tourism, eco Tourism up to Wedding Tourism so that tourism sectors are benefited.
4. Food Festivals provide a great opportunity for show of talent.
5. Food Festivals provide great revenue for skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled alike.
6. Food Festivals promote regional cuisines such as Chettinad Cuisine (Karaikudi), Kongu Cuisine (Coimbatore), Nanjil Cuisine (Kanyakumari).
7. Food Festivals can provide sustainable touch to dying cuisine art and poor artisans.
8. Food Festivals can create an interactive form of tourism where the participants can learn the food Preparations too.

<sup>2</sup> Curtains down on 'Dilli ke Pakwaan' food-fest, PTI : New Delhi, Sun Dec 29 2013, 21:16 hrs

<sup>3</sup> "The Chennai street food fest is back this year, bigger and better", The Hindu, 02 Aug 2013, Chennai

9. Food Festivals can also conduct Food Related Completions and can create new food items.
10. Food Festivals can promote the dishes and food products to be exported and improve business.
11. Food Festivals can be organised at all levels namely Star, Budget and Low end at the same venue.
12. Food Festivals are absolute delight to gourmets as a variety of food of all levels namely Star, Budget and Low are available for consumption at the same venue

## 7.2. Challenges

1. Food Festivals bring in wide variety of experts in one location so a challenge is to find a suitable Date to coincide with them.
2. Food Festivals can create a lot of wastages so environmental care is essential.
3. Food Festivals involve on-the-spot food production so danger of fire, oil and smoke is high.
4. Food Festivals may create unhealthy competition for the sake of cheap honour.
5. Food Festivals can bring in an expected level of participants so crowd management is crucial.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

In an increasingly global economy, tourism destinations not only have to contend with overseas competitors for economic survival, but also have to vie with other regions and destinations within their own country (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). Destinations, therefore, need to offer a unique and differentiated tourism product in order to remain competitive (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). The promotion of food in tourism is seen as one way of developing the distinctiveness and identity of a region while retaining and maximising the benefits of visitor spend to the region's economy and local communities. The overall aim of the research was to examine ways in which local produce could be used to strengthen the tourism industry in Tamil Nadu and contribute to regional economic development and destination differentiation. This helps protect existing jobs and create employment. Such is the integral nature of food in tourism that the benefits of stronger links between the two industries are often overlooked or often not recognised by destinations.

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