

**FOOD TOURISM IN THE NORTHERN REGION
A STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS PAPER
FOR NORTHERN TASMANIA DEVELOPMENT**



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to provide a strategic direction for the development of food and farm gate tourism in the northern region. The paper addresses the potential of food tourism for the region, its definition, impacts and recommendations to progress. It also identifies clear roles for Northern Tasmania Development, as the regional tourism authority, in the development of a regional food and farm gate experience.

The approach adopted was to conduct a food and farm gate forum (referred to as the Food Forum), which was held in Launceston on 13 May 2010 (agenda and list of participants is at Appendix 1), examine contemporary research, and review strategic approaches to food tourism in other destinations and provide recommendations.

FOOD TOURISM

It must be noted that food and beverages for that matter are a need not a want or desire, although the quality and pricing of food presented may go some way to satisfying wants and desires. As describe in the 2008 CAUTHE conference paper – *The food and Wine Trail: Domesticating a Hybrid*, “we largely eat to stay alive” and food is seen as banal, functional, prosaic and mundane as opposed to wine which is construed as romantic, poetic, symbolic and status laden. All visitors to a region will eat and drink; where, what and how they do this activity can be influenced through a regional food tourism strategy.

There is little doubt that a quality food tourism experience enhances a region’s tourism experience. It could be said that it is now a normal visitor expectation to be able to source quality food experiences in established tourism regions, such as Tasmania and its regions. The north of Tasmania is well placed to be able to provide a complete quality food experience from the “paddock to plate”.

The majority of Australian states, if not all, now place considerable emphasis on the ability to provide a quality food tourism experience to attract visitors and this is replicated internationally. The development of a regional food tourism experience can provide many benefits as the following examples demonstrate.

The Scottish National Tourism Organisation (SNTO) has identified food tourism as key sector in the development of tourism in Scotland. SNTO has developed a comprehensive strategy, including a significant and dedicated website, for food tourism which clearly acknowledges that food is a significant aspect of a visitor’s experience of Scotland. SNTO’s recent survey findings show that more than 70% of potential visitors to Scotland want to taste traditional dishes, regional specialities and fresh local produce. SNTO also indentified that food is an important economic and cultural resource offering tangible benefits for Scottish tourism but the food must provide a unique and authentic regional food experience.

The Irish Food Board in its research paper titled - *The Role of Food in Tourism and Tourism in Food* identifies the following points on the importance of food tourism for a region:

- It leads to a fast build of sales models in food;
- It allows the rural economic base to diversify via new agricultural and tourism products;
- It is an important instrument in regional development; and
- In its specialist form it can lead to levels of cooperation which have the potential to overcome disadvantages faced by small enterprises compared to large enterprises.

Tourism Western Australia states that the value-added element of the wine and food tourism industry fosters job creation, stimulates local businesses - especially in regional areas - and enhances wine exports and international tourism.

Tourism Tasmania acknowledges the importance of developing a quality food tourism experience and is currently developing a state wide Food and Beverage Experience Development Strategy which has a draft objective of:

“To identify and foster development of quality local or regional food experiences that offer a point of difference and competitive advantage in the market place and contribute to the significance of the food and beverage offering in our brand by reflecting on our natural environment and island culture”.

It is reasonable to expect that many of the benefits and advantages of food tourism identified in the examples above can also be translated to benefit the northern region through the development and implementation of a comprehensive food tourism strategy.

DEFINING FOOD TOURISM

In attempting to define food tourism it is evident that there are many possible variations to any definition. It is evident that farm gate tourism is either juxtaposed or a subsector to food tourism.

As Sarah Lebski, a leading tourism consultant, highlights in her draft *Food and Beverage Tourism - Market Assessment, September 2009*, it is very difficult to define food tourism and every organisation has a different view. Ms Lebski provides several examples of definitions of food tourism.

Dr. Lucy Wong of Bowling Green University, Ohio has been credited with coining the phrase ‘culinary tourism’ in 1998 and defines food tourism as being: “about food as a subject and medium, destination and vehicle, for tourism. It is about individuals exploring foods (and wines) new to them as well as using food to explore new cultures and ways of being. It is about groups using food to ‘sell’

their histories and to construct marketable and publicly attractive identities, and it is about individuals satisfying curiosity. Finally, it is about experiencing food (and wine) in a mode that is out of the ordinary, that steps outside of the normal routine, to notice differences and the power of food to represent and negotiate that difference”.

In the *Food Tourism Action Plan, 'Food and Drink Wales'* the definition of food tourism is “Any activity that promotes a high quality, distinctive, local and sustainable food (and beverage) experience linked to a particular place”.

Ms Lebski favors the Canadian Tourism Commission definition, which is: “Culinary tourism goes well beyond the dining experience. It includes a variety of culinary and/or agri-tourism activities, developed for visitors including food and beverages. These can range from food festivals to farm visits and factory tours and often involve discovery of a region’s unique dishes”.

Within the Food Forum there was much discussion on the definition, but no consensus. However, the discussion clearly identified the need to define food tourism in a simple way that covered all aspects of the food tourism sector. In fact, as suggested in the Food Forum, there is merit in developing a definition that encompasses a concept similar to the “Paddock to Plate”, as this has the potential to capture all aspects within the food tourism sector. The Food Forum’s views on definition would seem to also favor the Canadian Tourism Commission’s definition.

Some key definitional point or principles that emerged from the Food Forum were:

- Keep the definition simple;
- Ensure the definition reflects potential market(s) understanding and expectations;
- Any experience must provide an opportunity to exchange money for produce/experience;
- The experience must be able to provide information of the primary product ie milk to cheese; and
- The story of the product must be told through either the producers, locals and/or through thematic interpretation.

CURRENT FOOD TOURISM ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

Tasmania offers some special, quality culinary experiences but one issue highlighted in Tourism Tasmania’s *Draft Food and Beverage Experience Development Strategy* is the access to products and experiences is not always particularly easy.

This seems to apply in the region and although there are a variety of quality food tourism offerings within the northern region, these offerings are supplied at an individual operator level and lack any strategic and coordinated approach.

If the regional food tourism experience is to be developed, a specific entity must take responsibility for development and implementation of a comprehensive regional food tourism experience. The following information identifies the key steps needed to be taken to achieve this.

FOOD FORUM OUTCOMES

The forum was considered a very good start in identifying directions and actions for the development of a regional food tourism experience.

The forum identified the following key points and issues that will influence the development and direction of food tourism in the region:

- The Tasmanian Government's aim of developing the state as the "food bowl" for the nation;
- The high potential to develop new products in the food tourism sector;
- The need to develop a local food system(s) in the supply/distribution chain as opposed to corporate or global systems;
- The need to develop food tourism standards, for example the certification under Appalachian system;
- The need to ensure and promote innovation to get ahead of the consumer ie create the competitive advantage;
- There is substantial potential for food tourism to provide and receive benefits in the development of a strong Tasmanian brand;
- There is a need for a system that tracks produce that clearly identifies the what, where and who at any stage on the supply/distribution chain; and
- There is a need to be able to easily identify Tasmanian produce.

The forum also identified the following broad gaps that are restricting the development of the regional food tourism sector:

- Poor distribution of produce within the local environment, including building partnerships within the sector ie suppliers to retailers and product knowledge;
- Lack of marketing of food tourism experience (last farm gate guide produced in 1998, in conjunction with wine routes);
- Currently, there is a limited food tourism offering, particularly in potential farm gate tourism offerings with only 13 operations identified; and
- The need for cross promotion from operators in this sector.

In addition, the Food Forum identified future actions and roles for Northern Tasmanian Development, which are incorporated into this document.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Leading food champion and Nuffield scholar, Jane Bennett of Ashgrove Cheeses, in her report titled - *The Role of Regionality in the Marketing and Branding of Food (May 2009)* identified the following priorities that must be incorporated into the development of a regional food tourism strategy, and as she emphasises “particularly to capitalise on the marketing opportunities”.

- 1) Local food is a fundamental component of a regional tourism experience. To maximise the positive nature of such an experience for visitors cooperation must be achieved between regional food producers, regional food service providers, local independent retailers, tourism bodies, and government. Promotion of regional tourism needs to incorporate food as a core component of the tourism experience. Businesses that meet the desired criteria for a positive experience of regional food should be encouraged through inclusion within tourism publications and accreditation schemes.
- 2) Regional food producers in conjunction with tourism bodies and Government should work actively to build capacity with food service and retail businesses to enhance the regional food experience for visitors.
- 3) To encourage continuous improvement in the sector, awards recognising excellence in food tourism should be included in either tourism award programs or regional business award programs.
- 4) Visitor Guide's to Regional Food and Wine should be designed to provide an informative and educational experience for visitors:
 - a. Include only food producers with selling centres to the public.
 - b. Include restaurants and food service outlets that meet tourism accreditation standards.
 - c. Include retail outlets that feature local regional produce.
 - d. Include regional arts and craft under the same guidelines as food businesses to boost the offering of regional trails and create viable travel routes for visitors.

Comments arising from the Food Forum also confirmed the importance of the above points and any regional food tourism experience strategy must be developed with these points in mind.

NEXT STEPS

The major action to emerge from the research conducted through the Food Forum and the desk top analyses of food tourism is that there is a critical need to develop a comprehensive food tourism experience strategy for the region.

The strategy should at the very least address the following areas:

- a) Establishing the existing capacity of the food tourism sector in the region through an audit and mapping exercise;
- b) Distribution and coordination of products ie paddock to plate;
- c) Marketing and promotion including the development of a wine and farm gate guide (selected farm gates that are equivalent to wine offering on a trail of sorts);
- d) Product development ie gaps and opportunity analysis;
- e) Partnership development ie producers, processors, retail outlets, restaurants etc;
- f) Visitor engagement;
- g) Development of a complete regional food tourism website which includes areas such as:
 1. Regional food experience story
 2. Farm gate information
 3. Harvest calendar
 4. Food trail
 5. Food events
 6. Recipes that feature key local ingredients
- h) Combination of food tourism experiences with other tourism sectors such as arts, culture, heritage and of course wine;
- i) A suite of new food experience imagery for marketing and promotion purposes that is compatible for internet use;
- j) A communication plan aimed at food and tourism sectors and visitors; and
- k) be fully costed, with clearly defined goals and objectives and a practical and achievable implementation plan.

Other issues to consider in the development of the strategy, in addition to those previously identified, are:

- Regional dispersal of visitors;
- Brand development;
- Integration with the State government's Food and Beverage Experience Development strategy; and
- Potential integration with other regions such as Cradle Coast Region to develop a food tourism experience across the "top" of the state.

POTENTIAL ROLE(s) FOR NTD

It was very clear at the Food Forum that NTD could play a major role in the development of a regional food tourism experience. Currently there is an obvious gap in the region for an entity such as NTD to drive the development and implementation of a food tourism strategy.

Specifically, the following roles for NTD were identified at the Food Forum:

- The coordination of food tourism development at a regional level;
- The dissemination of information regarding the potential of this sector to grow farming and tourism businesses;
- Providing a regional point of contact for investors, suppliers, distributors, retailers etc; and
- Hosting of a consolidated online portal on food tourism.

Strategically, NTD has the potential to:

- provide the region with a food tourism strategy;
- assist, if not, implement a food tourism strategy;
- lobby governments to engage with the region and provide funding; and
- provide the link between stakeholders with the food and tourism sectors.

It is envisaged that within the development of a food tourism strategy the role for NTD would also be clarified and specific actions would be identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made.

1. That NTD seek commitment of funds from various stakeholders to enable the development a food tourism strategy for the region through either external or internal resources.
2. That NTD, as the lead agency, develop in partnership with the State and local governments, regional and industry stakeholders a comprehensive long term regional food tourism strategy.
3. That NTD be tasked with the implementation of the strategy once developed.
4. That NTD is supported both financially and in-kind from the State and local governments, and regional and industry stakeholders.

Appendix 1 – Food forum participants and agenda

Food Forum Participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
Michelle Strickland	Northern Tasmanian Development (NTD)
Howard Nichol	NTD
Jacinda Armstrong	NTD
Tony McCall	University of Tasmania
Sarah Lebski	private tourism consultant
Tim Barbour	Tasmanian Gourmet Sauce Company
Lyndall Healey	Pyengana Cheeses
Lindy Dornauf	Christmas Hills Raspberry Farm
Frank Hussey	Tourism Tasmania
Rick Dunn	Meander Valley Council
Andrew Frost	Launceston City Council
Kim Seagram	Stillwater and Black Cow restaurants
Karli Reeves	Food Connection Tasmania
Mike Badcock	Food Connection Tasmania

Food Forum Agenda

1. Introduction
 - Who's who around the table
 - Why this forum has been organised
2. Brief presentations from
 - Frank Hussey – Tourism Tasmania's take of farm gate and food tourism
 - Cradle Coast Authority – Development of Food Connections Tasmania
3. Food tourism priorities for the region
 - Identification of the priorities in food tourism for the region, which may include the following:
 - What type of regional food tourism experience should be provided
 - What are the gaps and opportunities in food tourism in the region
 - Is there a need to develop a comprehensive website for the region
 - What and how should food tourism be promoted or marketed
4. Defining farm gate tourism
 - What does farm gate tourism mean
 - What criteria defines farm gate tourism activities
 - What type of experience should be delivered
 - Should it be linked to other operations such as winery cellar door or farmer market, retail outlets
5. Online information
 - Potential for NTD to host a farm gate website or is it best to have a stand alone site
 - Items/ information to be included on the website
 - Harvest calendar
 - Food trial
 - Food experience trial
6. Where to from here