UNWTO Strengthens Links Between Agriculture, Gastronomy and Tourism

Donostia – San Sebastian, Spain, 6 October 2023 – UNWTO has held the 8th edition of its World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism co-organized with Basque Culinary Center (BCC), with a focus on the links between product, gastronomy and tourism.

The promotion and preservation of local products, the contribution of tourism to sustainable development, innovation and food waste all took center stage as UNWTO and BCC, also welcomed more than 300 online participants from 50 countries.

Opening the Forum, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “Gastronomy Tourism can play a leading role in promoting responsible agricultural practices, protecting biodiversity and reducing the environmental footprint. It can also create new opportunities for communities to thrive and protect their heritage and traditions and become an engine of growth and diversification for destinations supporting our roadmap towards the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Joxe Mari Aizega, General Director of Basque Culinary Center, added: “We are at a time to promote transformative dynamics and link gastronomy tourism with rural development. Territory, innovation and creativity are key to successfully moving towards a new scenario in which to promote a model of responsible gastronomy tourism focused on caring for people and the environment. It is essential to promote sustainable practices, harnessing the power of technology as an engine of growth and promoting the professional development of the sector, and to work to maintain the authenticity and diversity of the gastronomic offer.”

The opening ceremony also featured Rosana Morillo, Secretary of State for Tourism of Spain, Eneko Goia, Mayor of San Sebastian, Azahara Domínguez, Deputy for Mobility, Tourism and Territorial Planning, Provincial Council of Guipuzkoa, and Javier Hurtado, Regional Minister for Tourism, Trade and Consumer Affairs of the Basque Government.

On the occasion, world-renowned chefs Martin Berasategui and Pedro Subijana, notorious for their contributions to Basque cuisine's international recognition, were designated UNWTO Ambassadors for Responsible Tourism.
Tourism for Development and Growth

The Forum put the spotlight on gastronomy tourism's role in the preservation of local territories and the promotion of sustainable practices. A high-level panel of tourism ministers – Bulgaria, Puerto Rico and Zimbabwe focused on policies that strengthen agriculture, gastronomy and tourism. Expert-led discussions also focused on the protection of culinary traditions, the value of geographical indications, advancing the sustainability and resilience of rural areas, enabling producers to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and technology-driven world.

With gastronomy tourism one of the pillars of the UNWTO Agenda for Africa – Tourism for Inclusive Growth, the Forum also explored the sector's potential as a source of inclusive growth across the region. In a special address, the First Lady of Zimbabwe, Auxillia C. Mnangagwa, a committed promoter of African gastronomy highlighted that “gastronomy tourism globally has become an effective tool of attracting tourists, particularly those who are cognisant of the natural and nutritional value embedded in traditional foods. As nations we should be able to tap into our nutritional traditional cuisines to ensure a healthy living and socio-economic development of our nations. This is in line with our heritage-based philosophy for promoting tourism.”

Also on the occasion, UNWTO designated Chef Fatmata Binta as Ambassador for Responsible Tourism for her role in promoting African Gastronomy and community development. Chef Binta is a modern-day nomadic chef connected to the Fulani culture, customs, and cuisine of the biggest Nomadic group in West and Central Africa.

Gastronomy Tourism Startup Competition

In Donostia – San Sebastian, selected finalists from previous UNWTO Startup Competitions working on Gastronomy pitched their ideas. The solutions presented featured exceptional, personalized culinary experiences curated by renowned chefs (Searchef), streamlining waste management in hospitality (Eatinn), celebrating the flavours of Moroccan street food (Machi Mouchkil), establishing sustainability certifications and restaurant guidelines (Ecofoodies), and introducing a locally crafted, quality food delivery app (Oh les Chefs).

Oh les Chefs emerged as the winner, primarily for its strong potential for international expansion. They will gain access to a dedicated workspace within the LABe- Digital Gastronomy Lab for six months. Additionally, the startup will actively engage in the Culinary Action!, gastronomy entrepreneurship programme by Basque Culinary Center and enjoy a six-month membership in the GOe Digital Community.

To date, more than 700 startups from more than 100 countries have taken part in the competition. Applications are now open for the 4th Edition of the UNWTO Gastronomy Tourism Startup Competition in collaboration with the Basque Culinary Centre and powered by Alpitour World.
A Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in Tourism

Drawing from the recommendations in the Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in Tourism, released by UNWTO in collaboration with UN Environment Programme, the “Circular Solutions for Reducing Food Waste” session showcased diverse initiatives by hotels, restaurants and cruise lines.

Solutions ranged from prevention measures, such as mindful procurement and menu design; redistribution of food surplus to vulnerable groups and biomaterial processing; to circular strategies like composting or energy recovery. The discussions also emphasized the significance of education, innovation, and supportive regulations and policies in accelerating change.

Inaugural dinner offered by Chefs of Mahaia Kolektibo

The inaugural dinner of the Forum was hosted by Chefs of Mahaia Kolektibo, a collective of chefs committed to the evolution of Basque cuisine.

Aitor Arregi (Elkano), Jon Ayala (Laia Erretega), Xabi Gorrotxategi (Casa Julián), Dani López (Kokotxa), Javi Rivero (AMA), Roberto Ruiz (Hika), Gorka Txapartegi (Alameda) and Armintz Gorrotxategi (Rafa Gorrotxategi), all dedicated members of the Mahaia Kolektibo, showcased the essence of Basque cuisine, a hallmark of Donostia – San Sebastian that draws visitors from around the world.

UNWTO Announces the 2024 host of the World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism

The 2024 Forum will take place in Manama, Bahrain, the first time it will be held in the Middle East.

To conclude in an experiential way at the Forum, tomorrow, October 7, attendees will have the opportunity to choose from 6 different excursions to experience and savor local gastronomy.

Similarly, the parallel event “Culinary Plaza”, open to local citizens and organized by the Basque Culinary Center, in collaboration with the UNWTO, will highlight culinary specialties from destinations such as Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Porto and Botswana. It will do so through a gastronomic fair in food market format where it will be possible to delve into the culinary culture of these corners of the world and taste their cuisine in a unique atmosphere.

This year’s Forum is organized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Basque Culinary Center (BCC), with the support of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain, Basque Government, and the Provincial Council of Guipuzkoa, the City Council of San Sebastián.
Related Links

UNWTO Gastronomy Tourism

8th UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism

4th Gastronomy Tourism Startup Competition

Global Roadmap on Food Waste Reduction in the Tourism Sector

Basque Culinary Center