

Promoting South African Indigenous and Cultural Foods through Contemporary Menu Adaptations - A Case Study

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Abstract

The food service industry is an integral part of tourism both locally and globally, producing billions of meals annually ranging from take-outs to gourmet meals. Tourists returning to travel post-COVID-19 may be more discerning, making the promotion of authentic indigenous or local food experiences even more relevant. Even though the role of food in authentic indigenous experiences has only been evaluated to a limited extent, research has shown that authenticity is a vital trait and key motivator for tourists drawn to genuine indigenous experiences. Contemporary interpretations of classic cultural dishes and new dishes using indigenous ingredients should however be done with a sensitive cultural approach, acknowledging the indigenous culinary wisdom. This study presents an example of a contemporary menu with new or adapted food dishes, developed by Culinary Arts students at the University of Pretoria for a public event. Visual ethnography was employed as the methodology to collect visual data and capture menu adaptations and guide the discussion of indigenous cultural foods as part of promoting gastro-tourism experiences. Contemporary interpretations of classical cultural dishes and local foods, as well as newly developed dishes celebrating indigenous ingredients, have considerable potential to confirm the authenticity of South Africa as a tourism destination and increase its competitive advantage in this area. The case example presented in this paper is an illustration of how tourism can be rekindled after the global pandemic, and how much-needed stimulus for economic growth that could elevate the lives of local communities, can be created

Keywords: Culinary Arts, South Africa, Indigenous Foods, Cultural Foods, Contemporary Menus

Introduction

The food service industry is an integral part of tourism both locally and globally. South Africa is the leading food and beverage industry in Africa (Teuteberg & Aina, 2021) and the largest foodservice market in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ntloedibe, 2020; Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). Within South Africa, the food and beverage expenditure of both domestic and international travelers contributes 12.9% to the total tourism product (Statssa, 2021). Tourism in South Africa contributed nearly 3% to the country's GDP in 2019, and approximately 4.5% of total employment within the country (Statssa, 2022b). In 2020 the food and beverage sector suffered greatly because of COVID-19 lockdowns. The prohibition policies imposed by the South African government restricted the sale of restaurant meals, and take-out foods needed to comply to specific requirements in terms of operation and delivery. Businesses in this sector suffered greatly because of reduced consumer consumption and disruptions in the supply chain (Teuteberg & Aina, 2021). Fortunately, restrictions were eased gradually, and tourism is slowly returning to a new normal. An increased focus on local tourism resulted and hesitant international travelers are once again travelling to Africa. Both local and international tourism

has increased in the past year and brought about an income increase of 44,6% in the food and beverage industry in 2021 (Statssa, 2021).

Billions of meals are produced annually within the foodservice sector, ranging from take-outs to gourmet meals. Statssa (2022a) reports on food and beverage income within South Africa in three categories, namely Restaurants and coffee shops; Take-away and fast-food outlets; and Catering. The total income in this sector increased by 11.9 % in May 2022 compared to May 2021, with the take-away and fast-food outlets contributing more than restaurants and coffee shops (Statssa, 2022a). This sector generated income of 4.5 billion ZAR in April 2019 which decreased substantially during COVID-19, but is slowly increasing according to Statistics South Africa and reached almost 550 million ZAR in May 20 20 (Statssa, 2022a).

The South African hospitality industry is very competitive and despite the challenges of COVID-19 and economic difficulties, the foodservice industry is expected to grow. The strong presence of both domestic and international restaurant chains and fast-food establishments and the apparently continued demand for these establishments provides the driving force for growth in the foodservice industry (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). This growth in the foodservice industry is stimulated by the popularity of leisure tourism in South Africa and the tourism expenditure it generates. The rise in tourism in Africa and South Africa has led to an increased focus on local tourism and celebrating local food as part of the tourism experience. This local emphasis has culminated in improved trading relationships between hotels, restaurants and local suppliers, and is becoming an integral part of African tourism and the concomitant increase in tourism expenditure in foodservice outlets (Mordor-Intelligence, 2022).

The importance of food service in gastro-tourism or food tourism can consequently not be accentuated enough (Obonyo et al., 2012). Gastro-tourism is defined as the “intentional pursuits of authentic memorable culinary experiences while travelling internationally, regionally or locally” (Williams et al., 2014: 1). Foodservice within the culinary/food or gastro-tourism milieu includes both food and beverages, and ranges from anything such as the service of a simple cup of tea or packed lunches to inclusive meals provided by accommodation establishments, as well as independent restaurant offerings. The food service industry faces numerous challenges such as sustainability, staffing and minimum wages (Hogan, 2016), financial, regulatory and policy imperatives, changing customer expectations (Poudel & Thapa, 2019), brand identity and marketing, infrastructural challenges (Sheresheva & Kopiski, 2016), and many more. COVID-19 brought enormous additional challenges to the industry. Returning travelers may consequently be even more discerning, which highlights the promotion of authentic indigenous or local food experiences, and resetting of tourism on a resilient and regenerative pathway may require aspects such as “Getting back to basics”, “Valuing local and locals” and “Food for well-being” (Fountain, 2021).

In developing countries such as South Africa, traditional ingredients and dishes have until recently often been considered ‘embarrassing’ and ‘uncouth’, and are described by Bentley (2015) as being uncomfortably close to the rural realities of the ethnic groups. The lack of global acknowledgement of African food and the fact that it remains a ‘curiosity’, despite many food service establishments offering African food around the world, could be successfully exploited to promote the destination value of the country through marketing and promotions (Du Rand & Fisher, 2020; Tuomainen, 2018). In her colourful book *Zoe's Ghana kitchen*, author Zoe Adjonyoh (2017: 6), writes that “African cuisine has been surprisingly marginalized, both in people’s consciousness and on the high street”. She attributes this to the lack of African cookery shows and reviews of pan-African restaurants, and she brands Africa as the “last continent of relatively unexplored food” (Adjonyoh, 2017: 6). South Africa in

particular is a mosaic of cultures, rather than a homogeneous region connected by cultural heritage, religious affiliations as well as colonial and modern migrations (Roll, 2015). Consequently, this diversity has contributed to the culinary heritage identity of the South African “Rainbow Cuisine” (Snyman & Sawa, 2001).

Gastro-tourism development in South Africa is not only hampered by the fact that its food and cuisine remain unexplored, but also by the sluggish, inhibited and weak support from industry stakeholders (Moora & Dominic, 2020). However, modern consumers are learning to appreciate the role of local communities and their food traditions, and national governments are increasingly aware of the relevance of food for their tourist industries and are actively promoting marketable national cuisines (Bentley, 2015). The diverse and rich South African food culture and heritage (Du Rand & Fisher, 2020) provide an excellent opportunity for the development of gastro-tourism in the country, but also on the continent. The increased demand for local foods and the fascination with authenticity has created a challenge for the food service industry. Chefs can now reconsider their menu offerings and focus on the use of local produce and incorporate cultural foods and dishes on the menu for both local and international guests. Providing authentic food experiences to gastro-tourists challenges the culinary world to innovate and use indigenous and endemic ingredients in recipe creations and menu adaptations. Successful gastro-tourism experiences must be packaged and promoted properly, acknowledging indigenous culinary wisdom. Offerings should create a unique and interesting experience supported by the stories and practices behind the African and South African culture and cuisine (Moora & Dominic, 2020). Promoting indigenous cultural foods in this manner makes the destination much more competitive by providing a unique and diverse product, such as suggested in destination marketing, where unique tangible and intangible features are used to differentiate destinations (Stalmirska, 2021).

This paper therefore aims to illustrate how modern interpretations of South African classical cultural dishes and local foods, including newly developed dishes utilizing local indigenous ingredients, have the potential to offer authentic gastro-experiences to both local and international tourists through contemporary menu adaptations. The focus of this paper was primarily to capture and identify the ingredients used and innovative methods applied during menu adaptations of classical cultural dishes and newly developed dishes. Further analysis and categorization of the elements of cuisine will be reported in future publications.

Literature review

The review of existing literature firstly introduces the concept of cuisine, shaped by distinctive basic ingredients, flavours, preparation methods and rules of consumption (Hall, 2020). A link is made with South Africa’s food heritage and the influence culture would have on menu adaptations, followed by a short exposition of ‘wild’ foods in South Africa, as defined by Luczaj et al. (2012), understood to be those grown without being cultivated.

Cultural cuisine: Ingredients, flavours, methods and uses

Any global cuisine, including South Africa’s cultural cuisine, is shaped by four elements. It firstly includes a distinctive set of basic food or ingredient items, secondly the flavour principles, thirdly preparation techniques, and finally the rules of consumption, all functioning within a supply infrastructure that allows for acquiring food from field to fork (Belasco, 2008). It is therefore the available ingredients used in the preparation of dishes, including where they come from; how the food is prepared in terms of techniques and technologies; how the food is presented including the desired flavours; and finally how the food is and should be consumed (Sackett & Haynes, 2012). These components or elements includes hospitality (how we welcome guests to sit down and eat), and are of crucial importance to celebrate and market a

cuisine, such as the South African Rainbow cuisine (Hall et al., 2004; Long, 2013). Like most global cuisines, South African cuisine has been shaped and influenced by many factors over time, such as religious and sumptuary laws, geography, and climate, which mostly determines the availability of raw materials. Current influences such as trade regulations and others may not yet have had an opportunity to influence the development of the cuisine.

Culinary heritage informing menu adaptations

Food, according to Porciani (2020), is the most accessible threshold of culture. This concept contributed to the redefinition of culinary heritage by Avieli (2013) as a culturally constructed, self-generating process whereby food artifacts are consumed by various clients, attributing new meanings in different contexts. Local South African food and customs, as dimensions of culinary heritage, do not represent a static set of dishes and foodways that were in the past eaten by those in a specific location, nor a recent invention or fabricated attraction intended to lure tourists or those seeking out a culinary heritage experience. Food culture is therefore defined by Sackett and Haynes (2012) as the ways in which a particular group of humans thinks about food and how they cook and eat that food, where such cooking and dining practices are collectively referred to as foodways.

The cuisine of South Africa is often explicated along the four main demographic groups, namely Coloured South Africans, South African Indians, African ethnic groups of South Africa, and finally, European races of South Africa (Du Rand & Fisher, 2020). It is noteworthy that the cuisine of those classified as coloured South African would differ from that of people who consider themselves Cape Malay. The cuisines of black ethnic South African groups also differ among the different ethnic groups, such as Zulu, Xhosa, Bapedi (North Sotho), Ndebele, Basotho (South Sotho), Venda, Tsonga, Swazi and Batswana. In the same vein, English-speaking white South Africans eat differently from Afrikaans or other white South Africans of European descent, and South African Indian people who classify themselves as Hindu have different food habits from Muslim South African Indian people (Brook-Thomae & Abrahams, 2022; Du Rand & Fisher, 2020).

South African indigenous ingredients

Apart from culture, local or traded ingredients performs an equally important function in influencing and shaping a cuisine (Kocevski & Risteski, 2020). Until very recently, nomadic man was a hunter-gatherer who obtained food by killing animals and collecting wild fruits, leaves and roots (Van Wyk, 2019). Similar to other regions of the world, where ethnobotanical research has provided an overview of wild food plants (Luczaj et al., 2012), South Africa as a region is also rich in nutritious, robust foods. Examples include dry beans, samp, maize-rice and maize-meal, corn-rice, sorghum, groundnuts, offal, caterpillars, dried meat, vitamin-packed morogo, unusual vegetables such as amadumbe (Sitole, 2009), and even the recently domesticated rooibos tea (Van Wyk, 2019).

Even though local cuisines include indigenous fauna that are as important in menu innovations, plants have for a long time proved to be a more reliable source of food (Fox et al., 1982). Plant taxonomy, the science exploring, describing, naming and classifying plants, falls outside of this research, and even though this is a very systematic and phylogenetic analysis of plants that is traditionally based on macroscopic and microscopic morphological characteristics of the plant, it is also known to be somewhat unstable (Liu et al., 2017). However, in terms of celebrating a local or indigenous cuisine, innovators would naturally be interested in the fauna and flora of the immediate geography (Du Rand et al., 2016), and it is consequently understandable that those edible items that are endemic, indigenous and naturalised, would be favoured over commercially farmed food products. Unusual or exotic South African plant or

herb material would also be of interest to the South African innovator or menu designer wanting to showcase the uniqueness of the environment that supports South African cuisine.

In this instance it is important to understand the complexity of procuring food items of this nature, as such items may not always be purchasable. Innovators and menu designers may therefore need to resort to foraging certain items. A high level of selectivity of indigenous edible plant material should be practised as a consequence of availability, accessibility, ease of preparation and taste (Fox et al., 1982). Innovators need to be aware that it is not a simple matter of plucking leaves off a tree on the sidewalk, as the microbial safety of the food must be verified. Similarly, high rates of habitat destruction will inevitably pose difficulties, and an acute awareness of seasonality, the extremely precarious and short shelf-life of most foraged food, as well as very detailed planning in the use of such items, or the functional processing of food ingredients for later use, would also need to be kept in mind. Foragers should also have a keen knowledge of their environment, and apart from knowing when and where to forage, should know how to forage correctly, such as tearing off leaves, similar to how herbivores would have done it in the wild, so that no remnants remain when cutting a plant that could be susceptible to fungal diseases entering the leaf or stalk. Finally, it is essential that innovators should be aware of the challenges of properly storing foraged items. For example, the estimated postharvest physiological deterioration (PPD) of fresh cassava roots has a short a timeframe of 48 hours (Tomlins et al., 2021).

Contemporary menu adaptations through innovation

Food innovation is a catch-all phrase describing the developmental and production processes employed to create new food products that meet the needs of the consumer (Sandybayev, 2019). As consumer demands and expectations are continually changing, the food industry seeks new products to meet these demands. Meeting these demands is the reason why food service offerings globally and in South Africa are changing, stimulating a need to focus increasingly on local, indigenous, and endemic ingredients in an innovative manner. This increased demand is partially because of the growth in food tourism, now considered one of the most dynamic and creative components of tourism (Garibaldi et al., 2016; World-Tourism-Organization, 2012). The gastro-tourist is no longer content with the basics but increasingly requires something new, wanting to consume and experience the culinary culture and identity of the destination they are visiting (Garibaldi et al., 2016). To meet this demand in providing authentic gastro-experiences, new and different menus reflecting innovative recipe development and menu adaptations are required (Mifli et al., 2015; Richards, 2011).

Food experiences portraying traditional cuisines must be more innovative and creative to provide a high-level tourism experience. However, a balance between innovation and authenticity must be found to meet the need of the gastro-tourist and increase their satisfaction (Garibaldi et al., 2016). Food innovation in this context can be achieved by combining traditional and non-traditional elements, allowing for the preservation of the past while creating the future (Richards, 2003). These menu adaptations that apply innovative recipe development to indigenous cultural foods offer the gastro-tourist a quality experience.

Innovative adaptations can be implemented in various forms. It is possible to replace an ingredient with an indigenous plant or flavouring item, or adapting the food preparation by combining traditional cooking methods with modern applications to provide authenticity but still ensure that the gastro-tourist does not find the item too strange. It is necessary to maintain a sensible balance when applying innovative adaptations, assuring that the dishes remain attractive and do not exhibit extreme innovations of fusion cuisine, thereby foregoing authenticity (Zelený et al., 2020). Although innovation in appearance is desirable, it is imperative to preserve the authenticity of the dishes and ingredients and retain the indigenous

culinary wisdom. These components will determine the potential of the dish as an item that will attract gastro-tourists to South Africa and promote authentic South African cuisine.

Methods of research

This case study used a qualitative research approach in the form of visual ethnography as the methodology to collect visual data and capture contemporary menu adaptations. It is a valid research method and enabled the documentation of contemporary menu adaptations to guide the discussion of promoting indigenous cultural foods as part of gastro-tourism experiences (Schembri & Boyle, 2013; Zelený et al., 2020). Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria, reference number NAS 134/2019. Visual text in the format of photographs of the various adaptations, menu items and ingredients were collected and served as an effective and credible tool to provide and analyse evidence and disseminate research findings.

The Culinary Arts students at the University of Pretoria developed and prepared various new and adapted menu items for 50 guests at the launch of the Principal of the University of Pretoria's new research magazine (Re.Search). Visual images of the new and adapted menu items were captured during the event, and data regarding the innovative aspects as applied to the ingredients, seasoning and flavouring, preparation methods and tools were added.

Discerning evaluation and analysis of the visual text provided evidence and meaningful links to the culinary identity and heritage of the newly developed menu items celebrating indigenous ingredients, or classical cultural dishes and local foods. This process was performed by identifying innovation in terms of the ingredients used and the food preparation methods that were applied to accomplish an acceptable and authentic menu adaptation that was still suitable for the consumer and potentially the gastro-tourist. The appropriateness and authenticity of both new menu items and existing classical dishes were assessed regarding their potential to support and contribute to the development of South Africa as a gastro-tourism destination.

This qualitative method used visual text to generate ethnographic knowledge to illustrate innovation in menu adaptation using indigenous cultural foods. The collection of images as visual text, illustrating the various menu items, is a means of documentation and description of menu adaptations (Sayre, 2001). By documenting innovative use of indigenous cultural foods in contemporary menu adaptations, the culinary identity and heritage of cultural foods can be used to promote gastro-tourism. Visual text in the form of images is a valuable tool as it facilitates the description of the menu item and simultaneously provides recognition of the ingredients used, food preparation methods applied, as well as cultural knowledge, as aspects of innovation (Belk & Kozinets, 2006; Schembri & Boyle, 2013).

Issues of validity and ethical consideration were satisfied as the menu items were specifically adapted and developed for a specific event where their cultural significance was illustrated, and their credibility ascertained. During the planning and execution of the event, the students worked closely with their client to develop and adapt menu items utilizing indigenous cultural foods. Both the client and the lecturers who guided the students judged their work as accurate and authentic. This validation of their work establishes and illustrates the validity for this form of visual ethnography (Schembri & Boyle, 2013). The photographs capturing visual evidence of menu items were taken by professional photographers, whose permission to use the visual text were secured. Thus, all ethical issues were addressed.

Results and discussion

In order to promote the application and use of local foods and ingredients in contemporary menu adaptations, chefs and restaurateurs follow basic steps of innovation. South African innovators of contemporary menus can adapt existing cultural food recipes, or use basic endemic, indigenous or naturalized ingredients in brand new recipes or adaptations of existing recipes. These adaptations require careful sensitivity of cultural food uses and approaches developed over many generations. It furthermore requires careful testing and finetuning of recipes to ensure general mass appeal. Menu adaptations can be achieved through the adjustment of original recipes to produce dishes that may be more palatable to the uninitiated (Sammartino, 2010), or through the development of hybrid menus which celebrate a selection of ethnic dishes along with dishes that are familiar to diners (Ray, 2017; Tuomainen, 2018). The following is an example of a menu compiled for a specific event within the Culinary Arts subject of the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences, University of Pretoria. It illustrates that adapting existing recipes as well as applying traditional preparation and cooking methods to new recipes, can be done in a way that will still appeal to the average diner while showcasing the South African nation's food culture and indigenous produce. Compiling the menu posed certain challenges in terms of accessing indigenous ingredients, which are often not available during the winter season. The menu is a careful assimilation of heritage food items adapted for contemporary menu service, featuring an array of indigenous items, some of which were procured and frozen earlier in 2022 (such as the Marula) to be used later. For an arrivals bite (Figure 1) amasi (also called maas or mafi, a fermented milk product similar to buttermilk), was drained in muslin cloth over a couple of days. The process of reducing the liquid content of the amasi produced a lusciously creamy, slightly acidic cheese-like product similar to labneh, suzma or mâst chekide. This cheese-like product was a perfect vehicle to support sundried tomatoes and roasted courgettes, on a base of a halved grilled African aubergine (*Solanum melongena*).

For the first course (Figure 2), garri flour which is made from finely grated cassava tubers, was used to 'bread' the outside of Tilapia fishcakes. Garri is not a staple of South Africa, but commonly found in neighbouring Mozambique and easily found in food markets around Gauteng where immigrants from other African countries purchase their ingredients. The origins of Nile Tilapia can be traced back to Ancient Egypt. This fish is extensively farmed by small scale fish farmers in South Africa. A salad that combined the acidic punch of spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*), crunch from uncooked African water chestnuts (*Eleocharis dulcis*) as well as Zulu oregano leaf (*Plectranthus amboinicus*), and richness of pan-fried Jerusalem artichokes (*Helianthus tuberosus*) accompanied the fishcakes, along with a reinterpretation of the heritage food item Chakalaka, made in the style of a pesto. The dish was garnished with light blue plumbago (*Plumbago auriculata*) flowers.

A vegetarian main-course (Figure 3) consisted of a Palak Paneer-style curry, where the traditional thick green base was achieved by replacing the traditional spinach with Venda kale, along with a green leafy vegetable (GLV), collectively called Morogo in South Africa (Njeme et al., 2014). In this instance, these green leafy vegetables included creeping foxglove (*Asystasia gangetica*), okra and amadumbe, a taro (*Colocasia esculenta*). The paneer was replaced with maize cubes (croutons) made from fermented pap (Novellie, 1981). Even though maize only arrived in Africa from the New World in the 16th century, and dishes celebrating maize still fly under the radar of modern cookbook writers, it remains an important food staple within the 'maize belt', a group of maize producing countries that South Africa also belongs to (McCann, 2010). Pap, and specifically the culturally specific fermentation of pap, is deeply rooted in the South African food culture. The innovative adaptation used in this menu celebrates the refreshing sour taste that develops through fermentation.

In South Africa, which has the largest population of Indian people outside of India, curry dishes are common and often served with rice or breads. The vegetarian curry main dish on this menu was served with a risotto-style side dish made from sorghum and tef (*Eragrostis tef*), along with a chutney made from Marula (*Sclerocarya birrea*) and quince, plantain chips and Amagwinya (Knox et al., 2019), a deep-fried bread made with cowpea (*Vigna unguiculate*) flour and whole cowpea paste to replace the traditional naan or other Indian-style bread. Amagwinya, the Zulu word for this cultural cross-over food item, is a fat-cake (or vetkoek in Afrikaans), named as such for the fact that the yeast-proofed dough is fried in hot oil.

The dessert (Figure 4) comprised a roulade made from a carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) powder sheet cake, enclosing a filling of puréed roasted Lowveld Chestnut (*Sterculia murex Hemsl.*) and mascarpone, served with naartjie (*Citrus reticulata*) and *Mondia whitei* ice cream. *Mondia whitei* (Oketch-Rabah, 2012), is a woody climber belonging to the family *Apocynaceae*, of which the dried bark was used to infuse the ice cream base, imparting a complex citrus vanilla flavour that is difficult to compare to any other Western flavour. A chocolate and carob sauce, a toasted ginkgo biloba nut brittle and a small fruit-salad of Cape gooseberries (*Physalis peruviana*) and prickly pears (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) (Cactaceae), classified as a weed in South Africa, accompanied the roulade.

Menu

Grilled eggplant, sundried tomato, roasted courgette and drained Amasi rolls

Tilapia fishcakes with a Garri crust, with spekboom, water chestnut, Jerusalem artichoke and Zulu oregano leaf (*Plectranthus amboinicus*) salad, served with a Chakalaka pesto

Palak-style morogo, okra, Venda kale, amadumbe and fermented pap cube paneer curry served with sorghum and tef ‘risotto’

Marula and quince chutney

Plantain chips

Cowpea Amagwinya

Carob and toasted Lowveld chestnut roulade with chocolate and carob sauce, naartjie and *Mondia whitei* ice cream, ginkgo biloba brittle, Cape gooseberries and prickly pear salad



Figure 1: Arrivals Canapé



Figure 2: Tilapia Fish-cake Starter



Figure 3: Palak Curry Main Course



Figure 4: Carob Roulade Dessert

Conclusions and recommendations

The global foodservice industry produces billions of meals per year around the world. In this research, a case example of an innovative South African contemporary adapted menu celebrating local foods and ingredients was developed by Culinary Arts students from the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences at the University of Pretoria for a specific event. For too long, food, culinary or gastro-tourism have narrowly focused on the meal providers such as restaurants, and did not include the wider context of tourism and the local food system (Hall, 2020). Globally and in South Africa it is widely accepted that tourism contributes a significant proportion of the market for the foodservice industry (Hall & Mitchell, 2006).

Local foods are not always easily accessible to outsiders. Their engagement with these foods may be hampered by language barriers, perceived hygiene standards, and lack of culinary knowledge (Avieli, 2013) to name a few. In his comprehensive book on Zambian culture, author Mwizenge Tembo (2012) states that traditional or local foods are often represented as less than good, and in some cases construed as very poor, restricted, boring and uncreative by media. As a result, many average tourist-orientated restaurants emerge and thrive, often offering pseudo-cultural food in an ‘environmental bubble’ (Avieli, 2013), purporting to make local eating more accessible and palatable. The authors of this work instead suggest, through this case study, that local foods can be adapted for contemporary menus to illustrate and celebrate South African food heritage in ways that would appeal to locals as well as international tourists. The observation that the future of food lies in preserving the past (Civitello, 2011) certainly holds considerable truth. High-end restaurants offer a full ‘experience’, which includes everything from the initial presentation and communication with customers, to the pouring of beverages, to a short presentation of the dish (Čeperković, 2021). This approach need not be the exclusive domain of adapted high-end restaurant menus. Contemporary menu offerings could even be offered to the gastro-tourist in informal settings, such as food trucks. The success of such menu offerings is the food heritage context behind the food, the sharing of the experience using local ingredients, and innovation expertise.

Rekindling tourism after the global pandemic would provide a much-needed stimulus for economic growth in local economies. Innovative new or adapted menus and food dishes, celebrating indigenous ingredients and/or cultural food items are excellent strategies to enrich the culinary landscape and palates of diners and tourists (Tuomainen, 2018), and the potential to valorize local culinary traditions should therefore not be underestimated (Bentley, 2015).

Authentic indigenous food experiences are hugely important to culinary tourism, but perhaps even more importantly as a tool for marketing South Africa as a destination. By celebrating local foods and ingredients through adapted menus, the authenticity of South Africa as a tourism destination with increased competitive advantage may be confirmed.

In this paper, a single adapted menu illustrated the adaptation and contemporary application of heritage food items. However, future research may use a sample of menus to search for commonalities and themes informing the factors that would affect the success of such adapted menus for diners and even tourists. Finally, the frequently neglected phenomenological qualitative photo-based analysis employing PEFs can be a useful tool for research in the tourism field, especially in its initial phase.

Culinary or food tourism, by virtue of its considerable economic contribution that places bread on the tables of millions of people, are critical. Providing positive tourist experiences and leveraging the benefits of culinary tourism is important for sustainable business. However, it is time that the research agenda investigated the broader impacts of the entire food system's responsiveness to tourists' needs. It should consider how best to leverage economic and social benefits throughout the system; how to address issues relating to waste, emissions pollution, global environmental concerns and public health, and relationships between tourism, food justice and security.

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