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Approaching the kind tourist: Planet, animals and me in the world of culinary tourism

Food can play a fundamental role in tourists' perception and experience of the destinations they visit. Culinary tourism is a highly significant segment of the tourism market and a wide array of sectors benefit from its development. However, it is important to note the challenges and issues that arise from a growing human population and its quest to satisfy its need to experience the traditional, the novel and the niche in terms of food consumption. The United Nations have been consistently flagging, since 2006, that animal-derived produce has major impacts on the environment as CO₂ emissions resulting from animal agriculture have been identified as critically significant. From a health perspective, products of animal origin have been linked to a wide ranging set of harmful conditions including cancer and heart disease. From an ethical perspective, the industrial approach applied to using animals for food raises many ethical issues. The aim of this paper is to present a conceptual framework applied to the role of food on tourists' perception and experience of place in line with the environmental/health/ethical issues linked to culinary products derived from animal agriculture. The paper also presents findings stemmed from a qualitative pilot study conducted through six semi-structured interviews with EU-based tourists who follow plant-based diets. These were selected using convenience sampling and are understood as both primary and secondary culinary tourists as food consumption was either central or peripheral to their motivation to visit the destinations they spoke of. The paper provides insights into the range of factors connected to their plant-based diets that influence their perception and experience of the places they visit. These preliminary findings substantiate the premise that tourists who follow these diets have a range of environmental, health and ethical concerns that play a central role in their food consumption patterns and that these in turn influence the tourist's overall perception of a destination. However, these processes are inextricably linked to the individual's understanding and engagement with this fundamental triad of issues connected to the culinary sector and this paper preliminarily informs this under researched field of study.