



# Best Management Practices in Culinary Tourism

The International Culinary Tourism Association defines culinary tourism as, “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences.” Culinary tourism occurs when visitors seek to experience cuisine and culture together. Examples of culinary tourism include wine tourism in California, cheese sampling in Wisconsin, maple syrup tasting in Vermont, and Cajun food experiences in Louisiana. A diverse range of businesses including farms, restaurants, gourmet or specialty food stores, cooking schools, tour operators, breweries, wineries, historical attractions and many other related businesses across the country have capitalized on their regions’ culturally unique cuisines to attract visitors. When starting a culinary tourism business, assessing an existing operation, or considering a community-wide initiative to promote culinary tourism, consider the best practices described below<sup>1</sup> and consult available resources (see reverse side).

## Culinary Tourism Best Practices

### Focus on Authentic & Unique Experiences

Take advantage of the unique heritage, charm, hospitality, and sense of place that already exists in your community. Unique customer experiences provide hands-on, entertaining opportunities for visitors. These might include education about growing or preparing foods, cooking classes, and tasting events.

### Create a “Destination”

Creating a destination means offering an experience that customers are willing to pay for without sacrificing the uniqueness of the place. That is, what are visitors going to do while they’re here? In some cases this may mean coordinating with neighboring businesses or communities to develop more weekend itineraries that encourage overnight stays. Work together with local lodging, food service, and agricultural enterprises to create a network of services for guests.



*Participants on a Culinary Tour in Charleston, South Carolina sample local “hush puppies.” Photo courtesy of Laura Brown.*

### First Impressions Make a Difference

Businesses that serve tourists are the front door of the community. Understanding how you are perceived by visitors is essential to improving your “first impression.” Good first impressions involve trained staff who interact well with customers to ensure a safe and high quality experience. These customers will likely return and tell other potential customers about your business.

### Know Your Customers

Knowing where your customers are from and what their preferences and lifestyle choices are will help you tailor your offerings and pricing. Zip code data is an easy way to start (see Tools for Understanding Customers on the reverse side). Collecting email information may allow you to maintain regular contact with customers through e-marketing campaigns or Facebook.

### Work in Partnership

Culinary tourism businesses don’t have to be located in a business district to work together, and coordinating to serve a common market may be mutually beneficial. Agricultural, tourism, and marketing associations, community food system organizations, chambers of commerce, or business districts may help you develop your own niche in coordination with other attractions nearby. Using these networks may also expand your market and increase your number of clients.

### Comply with Health, Zoning, & Environmental Regulations

Whether your business is on the farm, in a restaurant, or at a processing facility, culinary tourism businesses need to have sufficient capacity (staff and infrastructure) to provide basic services such as parking, transportation, signage, customer assistance, and restrooms. Property and facilities should be well

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Roger A. Brooks and Maury Forman. (2006). Your Town a Destination, 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism. Destination Development, Inc.

maintained and in compliance with health, zoning, and environmental regulations. Keep up with food safety regulations and follow a food safety plan. For some businesses, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act may be required.

### **Plan for the Future**

Many small businesses don't consider it necessary to make a business plan, but developing one will help you think through scenarios and potential issues before you invest money. Given that the public will be using your facility, it may be useful to integrate a risk management plan. Plans should be active documents that you review and update on a regular basis.

## **Culinary Tourism Resources**

The following is a list of available resources related to best management practices in culinary tourism. Visit [www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/agchecklists/CulinaryTourismBestManagement.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/agchecklists/CulinaryTourismBestManagement.pdf) for links to these resources.

### **State Resources**

Your State's Department of Marketing and Tourism, Department of Agriculture, State Restaurant and Hospitality Associations, and University Cooperative Extension Service may have resources related to culinary tourism.

Here are a few examples of state resources:

#### **[Agritourism: A Web-Based Resource](#)**

From the University of Vermont Extension. Resources, research and links for farmers and entrepreneurs to learn about agritourism and culinary tourism, ranging from how-to guides and economic development studies to links to state-wide and region-wide associations.

#### **[Massachusetts Culinary Tourism Initiative](#)**

Including "How to Get Started in Culinary Tourism – A Resource Guide for Farmers" and "Who, What, Why and When of Culinary Tourism in Massachusetts."

#### **[Ohio Culinary Tourism Toolbox](#)**

How to create a culinary tourism product, resources for culinary tourism development.

#### **[Agri-Business Council of Oregon Culinary Tourism Fact Sheet](#)**

### **International Resources**

#### **[International Culinary Tourism Association](#)**

#### **[Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance](#)**

### **Getting Started**

#### **[Agricultural Resource Marketing Center](#)**

Rural, nature, and agritourism resources including state studies, how-to manuals, and economic development studies.

#### **[Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism: Farming for Profit and Sustainability Resource Manual](#)**

From Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA, 2004. Online manual contains over 2,000 pages of references divided into 20 chapters including rural tourism, agritourism, nature tourism, heritage tourism, business planning, liability insurance, and marketing.

### **Tools for Understanding Customers**

#### **[Downtown and Business District Market Analysis Toolbox](#)**

From Cooperative Extension. Includes resources for businesses and communities to better understand their trade area and customer demographics. Sector specific resources are available for restaurants and retail businesses.

#### **[Trade Area Analyst Software](#)**

Free from the University of Wisconsin. Uses GIS technology to help businesses and communities understand how far and from what geographic areas customers are traveling to a particular business or area.

### **Health, Safety and Accessibility Guidelines**

#### **[National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health](#)**

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Workplace safety & health topics for agricultural businesses.

#### **[Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)**

Information for businesses reaching out to customers with disabilities.

#### **[Small Business Administration's Business Licenses and Permits Search Tool](#)**

Food-based businesses are subject to federal, state, county and local guidelines and inspections. Requirements vary based on your business type. This site lets you know what you need in your area.

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**Visit [www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism](http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism) or call 802-257-7967 for more information.**