

What exactly people eat, and how they prepare their food, involves cultural and social studies, and for those with sufficient money and time, food, cooking and dining become part of one's lifestyle, giving rise to the terms 'food lover' and 'foodie'. The authors realize that food tourism is a luxury, but it is an important one that people gladly embrace when they gain sufficient discretionary income to support their interests. It does raise important ethical issues about equity and the distribution of the world's resources; it generates debates about power and privilege; and sometimes gives rise to resentment and antagonism. Yet it is a fact of life, a global phenomenon, and it deserves our attention.

Food: anything nutritious that people eat

Food tourism: travel for the specific purpose of enjoying food experiences

Foodie: a food lover; one whose personal and social identity encompasses food quality, cooking, sharing meals and food experiences; foodies incorporate all aspects of food into their lifestyle, which often leads them to travel for new and authentic food experiences.

There are several dimensions to being a foodie which are explored thoroughly in this book:

- Behaviour, including shopping, cooking and eating, and especially travel for food experiences
- Self-identity: what people feel about food or food tourism that defines who they are, including their values and attitudes
- Social identity: how people relate to each other and form or reinforce their identity by being a foodie or food tourist in social settings; this includes sharing food experiences with others and belonging to food-lover groups

Tourists have to eat, but they do not have to take any interest in what they are eating, and the food is not necessarily an attraction. Food is often a 'hygiene' factor in the literal sense (causing many illnesses) and in the sense that bad food experiences can ruin a trip (Pendergast, 2006). While food and tourism are inseparable, many tourists avoid eating anything unusual (they are neophobes), many are ambivalent about their food experiences (it's not a big deal for them), while others go literally anywhere for a memorable and novel food experience (they are neophiles).

Confusion about other important terms has been noted by many, including Karim and Chi (2010, p. 532) who said "Tourism activity related to food has been labelled such as food tourism, culinary tourism, or gastronomy tourism. These terms have the same meaning: people travel to a specific destination for the purpose of finding foods".

We employ 'food tourism' in this book - to keep it simple and broad, and to avoid any bias or stereotype associated with other terms. The other two terms most frequently used to describe food tourism that have come into vogue are 'culinary tourism' and 'gastronomy tourism'.

■ What being a foodie is NOT!

It goes without saying that people have to eat, and that wanting to eat food that tastes good is a common human trait. If that is all there was to being a food lover we would not be making such a big deal about it in the realms of tourism, hospitality and culture. Being a foodie is definitely not about gluttony, or over-indulging in food and beverages. It is possible to say "I love eating and therefore I am a food lover", but that is not the same as being a glutton, which implies excessiveness and greed.

Our research shows clearly that quality is a paramount concern of the foodie: quality of produce, cooking, and food-related experiences. Some would associate those attributes with luxury, and it does take money to indulge oneself this way on a foreign trip, but we also have to acknowledge that one can be a foodie and stay at home! Food quality is therefore much more important than eating or drinking a lot. This is not to say that foodies never over-indulge! It happens.

Finally, some people believe that being a foodie is a reflection of healthy-living values, or that foodies *must* engage in only healthy eating. This is a problematic area, because our research shows that health concerns are important to foodies, but not paramount. It is reasonable to conclude that many foodies are health conscious, but it is not a defining characteristic. If one was to insist that being a foodie requires healthy eating, then several serious issues arise: what is 'healthy' is often open to medical debate, and seems to keep changing; there are definitely cultural norms that affect one's interpretation of healthy; and being healthy in general does not preclude indulgences at various times.

■ Foodie lifestyles

It has been generally accepted that we live in the era of the 'experience economy' as articulated and popularized by Pine and Gilmore (1999). In this economy people value experiences more than objects and mere consumables, so that foodies and food tourists are willing and often eager to pay for rewarding and novel experiences. Consumption in this economy holds symbolic value, and consistent patterns of symbolic consumption generate and help define discernable lifestyles.

Lifestyle: A way of life or style of living that reflects the attitudes and values of a person or group (thefreedictionary.com)

The term 'lifestyle' is popular, but rather vague. There are a number of possible connotations, including the view that your lifestyle sets you apart from others, that a healthy or moral lifestyle is highly desirable, or that some people have enviable lifestyles (e.g., lifestyles of the rich and famous). A 'bohemian' or 'counter-culture' lifestyle comes close to the concepts of sub-culture and social worlds, as discussed later.

This is how an American marketing firm describes the foodie lifestyle: (<http://www.hartman-group.com/hartbeat/understanding-the-foodie-consumer>)

As we've described, consumers embracing foodie lifestyles love to smell and taste fine foods and actively seek out new food experiences. For foodies, in fact, it's all about the experience whether at home, in stores or eating out. Dining out is a favorite foodie behavior: foodies love the theater of restaurants, watching chefs in action and sitting at chef's tables...These bon vivants are just as likely to embark on a culinary vacation to Napa Valley, Tuscany or Provence as they are to seek gustator aspects of discovering new meals, wines and recipes locally...

Foodies are information junkies. They are inveterate enthusiasts of food-oriented magazines, television shows and scour the Web in pursuit of recipes and knowledge about various ingredients. Foodies are typically immersed in the collection and use of a broad range of cookbooks.

A precondition is that 'lifestyle' is voluntary and reflects one's personal and social identity, so if you do not have enough to eat it is pointless to talk about a foodie lifestyle. As well, there are aspects of lifestyle that are socially and culturally influenced, and in this vein it is clear that the term 'foodie' is historically very recent in origin and reflects a number of profound trends that we later identify as arising from several propelling forces. These forces can change, and so can notions of what is socially acceptable or desirable.

In this way, lifestyles incorporate and reflect fashion and 'political correctness'. It is therefore possible to foresee a not-too-distant future, (this is scenario making, not prediction) shaped by constraining rather than propelling forces, in which being a 'foodie' and 'food tourist' hold negative connotations linked to unsustainable practices, and therefore the words and associated lifestyles might fade away. It is quite possible that living a 'greenie lifestyle' will take over in terms of popularity, or by necessity.

■ **Gastronomy and cuisine**

Unfortunately, gastronomy, and the related terms gourmet or gourmand, are frequently value-laden in usage, as they imply a lavish or elitist perspective on food preparation and dining. Dictionary definitions from Merriam-Webster (online) emphasize the connection to 'fine' or 'good food' which is certainly open to interpretation, and regard the 'gourmand' as given to excessive eating: