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Consuming *La Dolce Vita*: Culinary Tourism and the Quest for Authenticity in Italy,

1951-2018

By

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Italy exists as one of the most popular destinations for any tourist, offering beautiful scenery, awe-inspiring architecture, and world-renowned art. Over time, Italy has also earned notoriety for its cuisine, resulting in the rise of tourists participating in culinary tourism throughout the country. Culinary tourism is unique, as eating is necessary for any person, all tourists in some way partake in it.¹ More frequently, tourists, particularly American tourists, view sharing in Italian cuisine as a way of accessing an “authentic” Italy which is supposedly hidden away in the age of mass tourism. Authentic Italy is perceived as slow, leisurely and full of pleasure and food has now become one of the ways to best capture that experience. By moving “off the beaten path” the expectation then becomes that by consuming the food, the tourist is accessing Italy as a local and partaking in authentic culture.

The expectation and perception of what is authentic can be easily manipulated by common tourist sources such as guidebooks, the internet, and even film. Italy and its food have become synonymous with the stereotype of *la dolce vita* or the sweet life. These sources simultaneously promote a limited image in relation to the diversity of Italian food, focusing primarily on the regions with iconic Italian food: wine, cheese, olive oil, and pasta. This stereotype led to a disparity of food tourism by region in the country, favoring regions such as Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. While these foods are authentic in the strict sense of their production being Italian, a sense of mystification exists around these foods and what it means to consume them, resulting in the development of staged authenticity.² Tourists perceive Italy as a land of leisure, where the food is traditional and homespun, removed from the commercialization and mass production of

¹ Athena H.N. Mak, Margaret Lumbers and Anita Eves, “Globalisation and Food Consumption in Tourism,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 1 (2012): p. 171.

² Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 101.

the world. Both familial and romantic relationships are created and sustained in the Italian food image. Culinary tourism is promoted by these commercial sources as well as by the Italian government as one of the best ways to experience authentic Italy. The perception of Italian food that tourists develop before their travels through commercial sources such as guidebooks, the internet and film creates a skewed image that further reinforces common misunderstandings of Italian food in relation to culture, which has created a staged authenticity in culinary tourism reliant on the fulfillment of the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita*, while also creating disparity in the development of regional culinary tourism in the country.

During the Grand Tour, which lasted from the mid-17th century to the end of the 18th century, many people, predominantly elite men, traveled through Europe and into Italy to complete their education.³ Those who journeyed to Italy during this time did not seek a religious experience, such as those pilgrims who traveled before them, but rather to complete their aesthetic education during the age of Enlightenment.⁴ As the motivation and goals for tourism shifted focus from religion to secular interest, guidebooks began to increase in both production and influence over the actions of tourist. It was during this time that guidebooks such as the 1749 *Grand Tour* by Thomas Nugent, became essential for travelers, dictating their aesthetic and cultural experiences, while also providing practical instructions for the tourists' actions.⁵ After the Grand Tour moving into the 19th century, the main guidebooks used by English and German speakers were those published by Karl Baedeker and John Murray.⁶ These guidebooks developed on the legacy of the Grand Tour guidebooks before them, becoming more descriptive and assigning a higher cultural value to certain tourist attractions within Italy, while also attempting to apply a sense of

³ Stephanie Malia Hom, *The Beautiful Country*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 37.

⁴ Ibid, 37.

⁵ Ibid, 38.

⁶ Ibid, 43.

authenticity to the touristic actions.⁷ It was during this time that guidebooks emerged as the primary source for tourists in their interactions within Italy, and they have continued to develop the perception of Italy as an idyllic country removed from globalization, where tourists can be a part of the slow, leisurely life in Italy.

While guidebooks are seemingly benign, their influence on tourist perception and the development of the image of a destination is more powerful than the general consumer is aware. Guidebooks act as sources which inform the actions and interaction of the tourist within the chosen destination. This allows guidebook authors authority in manipulating the experience that tourists put into practice.⁸ More often than not, the central theme guidebooks concerning Italy sell to the consumer is the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita* or the sweet life, which frames Italy as a space of leisure and pleasure.⁹ To partake in this stereotype is to experience the slow, romanticized lifestyle of Italy and immerse oneself like a local in the culture, unconcerned with Italy's reality within the globalized world. By drawing on the beautiful landscape, rich culture, and decadent foods, guidebooks construct an imaginary Italy for the tourist, sold as authentic Italy.¹⁰

Stephanie Hom, a former Professor of Italian at the University of Oklahoma, puts forth the concept of destination Italy as an imaginary, or simulated Italy, that exists within the country itself. Destination Italy, she argues, is a homogenization of culture, a space of leisure, removed from the actual country, which continually reinforces stereotypes of Italy as a land of authenticity and simplicity. While Hom does a good job in analyzing various sources, such as

⁷ Rudy Koshar, "What Ought to Be Seen': Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (July 1998): 339.

⁸ Hom, 23.

⁹ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

guidebooks and postcards, she fails to examine how the image of Italian food and food tourism within these sources also influences the creation of this space and the perpetuation of the broader cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita*. The influence of guidebooks and other commercial sources are unmatched in developing the tourists' relationship and expectations with Italy and its cuisines. In order to understand how these influence expectation and perception, it is important to understand the theory of the tourist gaze.

In 1985 John Urry proposed the theory of the tourist gaze, which can be loosely defined as the perception and expectations that a tourist brings with them to a destination and the resulting influence of those perceptions in developing the image of the destination. In the case of Italy, commercial resources, such as guidebooks, magazines, and film are all successful in promoting anticipation and fantasy about Italy which sustains and reinforces the stereotypes.¹¹ The success of tourism in Italy is connected to the signs collected by tourists in their preparations and are perpetuated both in imagination and practice in deeming certain places and things as worthy in their experience.¹² Cuisine in Italy has become one of those signs which tourists deem as necessary to a holistic and authentic experience, resulting in the development of food tourism directly intertwined with the tourist gaze. Urry's theory becomes influential in food tourism when one analyzes the ways in which the tourist is exposed to the cuisine beforehand. In the case of Italy, the language surrounding Italian food in both guidebooks and magazines, as well as the images provided through social media and film, form a certain construct of Italian food in the tourists' mind, in terms of what food is available and the feeling and experience consuming said food will provide. The burden then moves to Italy and the tour companies to fulfill the

¹¹ John Urry, *Consuming Places*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 132.

¹² *Ibid*, 139

expectations of the tourists', in order for them to deem the trip successful and recommend it to others.

The romanticizing of Italy and its food creates a staged authenticity that tourists, in turn, interact with and continue to perpetuate.¹³ Staged authenticity, MacCannell argues, is a tourist setting meant to mimic the authentic experience and feeling the tourist expects.¹⁴ The importance of food in cultural homogenization and staged authenticity is especially prevalent in Italy, where the expectation of spaghetti and pizza overshadows the diversity of the nation's cuisine. Further, this staged authenticity also perpetuates stereotypes in the feeling and experience of consuming the cuisine itself. The concept of authenticity itself becomes blurred, as it can be applied to both authentic cuisine and authentic experience, and as such the food itself is constantly changing to match tourist perception.¹⁵ It can be argued that the only true authentic Italian pizza derives from Naples, but in the general tourist mind, pizza itself is an authentic Italian dish. Authentic experience then moves beyond the actual cuisine and rather, to the experience or feeling connected to the food. Beyond the tourist gaze and expectation of these experiences, food tourism in itself hinges on the literal consumption of culture in the form of cuisine, which results in a more integrated experience.¹⁶

It is also through food tourism that tourist identity and host otherness are further reinforced, in conjunction with both the tourist and their gaze and the concerned industry of the nation. The appeal of culinary tourism, in this case, is, for the tourist, the opportunity to act as a local in the

¹³ C. Michael Hall and Liz Sharples, "The consumption of experiences or the experience of consumption? An introduction to the tourism of taste," in *Food Tourism Around the World*, ed. C. Michael Hall, Liz Sharples, Richard Mitchell, Niki Macionis, Brock Cambourne (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003), 4.

¹⁴ MacCannell, 101.

¹⁵ Mak, Lumbers and Eves, 180.

¹⁶ Lucy M. Long, "Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness," in *Culinary Tourism*, ed. Lucy M. Long (University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 21

consumption of cuisine, and to make the other more familiar.¹⁷ Food and its consumption already exist as a way through which groups forge identity and bond, allowing tourist consumption to create an imagined identity or stereotype of the place.¹⁸ It then becomes a matter of the importance of culinary tourism in the development of Italian stereotypes and the perception and consumption in developing the image surrounding Italy.

To understand the role of tourists in creating and reinforcing the stereotype of *la dolce vita* and the influence that food tourism has played in perpetuating it, the development of Italian national identity through food and its rise as a tourist destination must be examined. After World War II, Italy had to reckon with both massive economic and political restructuring. The dire economic state was especially noticeable in the food consumption or lack thereof of the Italian citizens. In the first six years following the war, prior to the economic boom of the 1950s, many of those living in Italy were malnourished and living off an average of fewer than 2,000 calories a day.¹⁹ During the fascist regime, food was not promoted as a cultural symbol or source of identity for the people, as it is now. Instead, it existed only as a source of nutrition that the Italian citizens needed to fulfill their modern industrial roles.²⁰ It was only after the war and the economic boom of the 1950s that food began to influence the creation of a united Italian identity within Italy itself.

It was the economic revival, referred to as the *boom economico*, which occurred from 1951 till 1963, that allowed Italians the freedom to choose their desired cuisine and saw consumption habits incorporate both this new prosperity and traditional foods. The Italian food industry

¹⁷ Janine Chi, "Consuming Rice, Branding the Nation," *Contexts* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 52.

¹⁸ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

¹⁹ Carol Helstosky, *Garlic, and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 127.

²⁰ Matthew Hibberd, "National Tastes: Italy and Food Culture," in *Educated Tastes*, ed. Jeremy Strong (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 96.

assisted in reinforcing traditional habits by producing goods commonly associated with the Mediterranean diet, such as pasta, olive oil, and wine.²¹ Food for the Italians during this time became a way for them to reckon with the past, while the state and industry involvement in preserving habits allowed for the development of cuisine distinct to themselves. Trade liberalization by the Italian government combined with the fear of dramatic political and social change, as well as nostalgia for the imaginary past developed cuisine as a strong base for national identity.²² It was this imaginary nostalgia that tourists in Italy were exposed to, resulting in the connection of common tropes such as tradition and love, to the food they were consuming.

However, there was still a sharp distinction between the prosperity of the north in comparison to the south. Those living in Northern Italy were spending more on food and utilizing less of their average incomes to do so, outspending and out-eating those in the south, where poverty and malnutrition were still common problems.²³ The excess in food culture did not reach every corner of Italy, and even then, the cuisine that began to form national identity was not immune to nostalgia meant to combat political and social change. The development of food as a marker of national identity and its interconnectedness within political and social issues is important to this topic, as we will see that in tourism, the political and social issues connected to food in Italy are ignored in favor of “traditional” cultural experience that satisfies the taste buds and fulfills the *la dolce vita* experience.

It was during the economic boom that mass tourism made a return to Italy, elevating its industry and resulting in the mobilization of both foreigners and nationals throughout the country. The economic growth in the '50s and '60s in the United States allowed for new forms of

²¹ Helstosky, 127.

²² Ibid, 129; Chi, 53.

²³ Ibid, 136

consumption, mobility, and leisure which resulted in the development of new forms of tourist practice and commodification.²⁴ Tourism was made easier by advances in transportation, namely motorways and airplanes, which made the practice of tourism and the leisure of holidays more inclusive to all classes. The influx of tourism within Italy, aided by the invention of all-inclusive packaged tours, began to solidify the commodification of “destination Italy”, removing Italy from its very real political and economic issues and placing it firmly as a land of leisure in the tourist's eye.²⁵

By the mid-1960s, nearly 1 million American tourists were arriving in Italy each year, in part from the ease of travel through airplanes and a growing middle class which could now afford to travel.²⁶ The movement of tourists into Italy also resulted in restaurateurs and the tourist industry shaping a certain image of the national cuisine for the tourist to consume.²⁷ The homogenization of national cuisine by the restaurants, which is still prevalent today, marketed an image of Italian food which the tourist then assumed as universal, creating the skewed perception of cuisine in Italy.²⁸ In the creation of the homogenized national cuisine, regional cuisines were manipulated and the imagined ideal of authenticity was elevated. It is in this way that the tourist industry acts with and reinforces the limited understanding of food culture and the experience surrounding it, ceding to the expectations that are instituted by the tourist gaze. The tourists in these interactions remained unaware of how the changing landscape of Italy and the migration of peoples influenced their consumption and perception of authenticity. While tourists seek out these authentic experiences, it becomes more difficult to discover them, as the tourist industry

²⁴ Hom, 128.

²⁵ Ibid, 129.

²⁶ Ibid, 142.

²⁷ Helstosky, 144

²⁸ Chi, 55, Helstosky, 145.

constantly changes to fulfill this tourist expectation, and therefore develops multiple layers that appear authentic but are staged.²⁹

Beyond the Italian economic boom allowing for a diversification in the purchasing and consumption of food throughout Italy, it also triggered a mass migration of Italians from the south to the north and outside of Italy. Many of those restaurants which provided the hearty spaghetti and wood-fired pizza throughout the country were catering to those southern migrants, who brought those dishes north with them.³⁰ During the years of economic growth, over 2.5 million rural Italians migrated towards urban centers or elsewhere into Europe.³¹ Italians who migrated brought their foods with them, resulting in a mix of cuisines and the necessity of modification in preparation to exist within the new area based on product availability and the new destination's palate. Americans and other foreign tourists who visited regions that experienced a heavy influx of migrants from the south, such as Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, consumed a culture that was in the process of diversification and placed those experiences on Italy as a whole, creating a skewed image of Italian food and the perception of Italy in relation to cuisine.

Aware that food did indeed play a large role in the development of national identity and the formation of a national bond, it establishes that tourist involvement in culinary tourism is a viable way in which stereotypes are formed. The migration of Italians, both throughout Italy and into other countries, resulted in a mix of food cultures and therefore provided a new food source for tourists to consume. It is undeniable that the movement of peoples results in the mixing of cultures and therefore a homogenization of cultural products meant to fit in the new

²⁹ MacCannell, 100

³⁰ Hibberd, 98.

³¹ Helstosky, 128.

destination.³² In this sense, food is modified to fit or appeal to the tastes of the new area – it can also change given what products and supplies are available. This leads to the development of a traditional food with modified aspects, which altogether changes the perception of that food and bears the question of its authentic nature. Within America, Italian migrants came primarily from areas such as Sicily, Campania, and Abruzzo, bringing with them pizza and dry pasta.³³ Italian restaurants, both then and now, played a role in distributing the modified Italian-American food, which led to a skewed perception of food within Italy.³⁴ The resulting homogenization is essential to the discussion of authenticity in both the cuisine itself and how it influences the creation of “authentic” Italy. Many tourists view culinary tourism as one of the main ways to encounter the culture from the inside and participate in an authentic experience. However, today many Americans dine at Italian restaurants within the United States prior to their travels, such as that of Olive Garden. These restaurants are not only providing modified Italian cuisine but also commercializing the cultural stereotype of Italian culture and cuisine, intrinsically connecting them to family and tradition.³⁵ This results not only in consumption of homogenized cuisine but also the formation of general stereotypes and these experiences ensure that the authenticity that the tourist believes they are interacting with is in reality, a mixture of commercialized traditions and modernization.

Migration and the consequent change in cuisine have played a large role in the development of the tourist gaze and the stereotypes which tourists use to construct the larger concept of the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita* within Italy. Due to the shifting landscape of Italy in terms of

³² Alberto Grandi, “Pizza, Rice, and Kebabs: Migration and Restaurants,” *World History Bulletin* 30, no. 1 (2014): 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁵ Fabio Parasecoli, “We are Family: Ethnic Food Marketing and the Consumption of Authenticity in Italian-Themed Restaurants,” in *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the Production of Ethnic Identities*, ed. Simone Cinotto (Fordham University, 2014), 255.

people, as well as the movement of Italian food out of the country, labels such as “typical”, “traditional”, and “authentic” tend to exist as tools to sell to the tourist.³⁶ Due to a large number of migrants throughout the world, Italian food takes a different shape in every place it has developed, and result in different experiences at home. While pasta, olive oil, wine, and cheese are all very real products within Italy as food sources, they are the dominant image or myth that tourists bring with them to Italy because those are the products that are most commonly encountered at home.³⁷

These experiences place the burden of authenticity on the nation of Italy to either fulfill or negate those experiences with Italian food in different areas. If Italy fails to meet the expectations of the tourist, that have been informed by both tourist marketing and experience at home, then the cultural exchange might be considered a failure. Although the tourist is not aware of what is actually authentic, their perception of authenticity is the only thing that needs to be met in order for the experience to be considered a success. It is in this search for authenticity and verification of the perceptions and anticipation, created by commercial resources, that the regions most commonly known for those products become the most frequented. Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont are listed as the best areas for culinary tourism, not because they have the best food specifically out of all the regions in Italy, but because they are the regions that best fulfill the tourist expectation for an authentic cultural experience.³⁸ Tuscany is known for its wine, while Emilia-Romagna is known for its balsamic vinegar and cheese; foods which we encounter at home and seek to verify as authentic on location.

³⁶ Massimo Montanari, *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*, trans. Beth Archer Brombert (New York: Columbia University, 2013), 62.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

³⁸ “Eating,” Lonely Planet, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/in-location/eating/a/nar/1f3cd54c-2930-450f-8d25-d1fe147b91e9/359845>

The complexity of authenticity in Italian food becomes a larger issue when reverting back to tourist perception. While the reality of Italy and its cuisine is complex and incredibly varied, tourism within the country still exists in the removed space of “destination Italy”. This construction of an idealized Italy and modified cultural experience through guidebooks, film and the internet makes it nearly impossible for the tourist to encounter any true authenticity, and instead perpetuates false concepts of authentic experience.³⁹ These sources must be examined for their use of language and image in applying the tropes of tradition removed from modernism and love to food and how that furthered the general stereotyping of Italy.

Tourism in Italy for the foreigner developed over time to focus on more than the history and monuments. The lack of the emphasis of culinary tourism in the guidebooks earlier in the 20th century allowed for broad concepts of Italian food to be applied to the entire country, perpetuating the misunderstanding of Italian cuisine. While tourism developed rapidly in Italy, in thanks to the economic boom and the growing ease and speed of travel, the main focus was based on the monuments of Italy rather than its cuisine. Culinary tourism was non-existent and therefore not emphasized in the guidebooks of the 1960s.⁴⁰ Any discussion of Italian food ignored the regional difference and subsequently allowed for pasta to become the dominant image of Italian cuisine.

In Ludwig Bemelmans’ 1961 *Bemelmans’ Italian Holiday*, which was first published in Holiday magazine, spaghetti commands the diet of the tourist. While the guide works through various locations in Italy, such as Venice, Rome, Naples, and Capri, no regional dishes were brought to the forefront for the reader to imagine or consume in the mind.⁴¹ The heavy emphasis

³⁹ Urry, 140

⁴⁰ C. Michael Hall and Liz Sharples, 11.

⁴¹ Ludwig Bemelmans, *Bemelmans’ Italian Holiday*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), ix.

on the non-descript encounters with spaghetti fueled the tourist imagination of the cuisine as a national dish. Lively descriptions and the elevation of one type of product developed a dominant image in the tourist imagination and expectations of what was available in the country.⁴²

Bemelmans further reduces the type cuisine in Italy, offering Hungarian and Austrian restaurants, instead of other Italian foods to the tourist audience, as an alternative should one get tired of spaghetti.⁴³ For the U.S. tourist imagination, it became simple to associate Italian cuisine with only spaghetti when there was no other cuisine mentioned that would create a fuller concept of Italian food. Bemelmans leads the tourists into the South of Italy, purposefully skipping over the North, which was referenced to as the “Pittsburgh of Italy,” as the North was more industrialized and modernized than the South.⁴⁴ This geographical preference was a common theme throughout all guidebooks, and still prevalent today. The preference given to certain areas and their cuisine also played a role in the regional development of Italy.

Bemelmans does not place any emphasis on the spaghetti as the reason to travel though, and it is rather a supplement to the beautiful people and sights. This same theme is seen in the guidebook *Main Street Italy*, which devotes a small section to the topic food, but once again gives a limited description of the cuisine available to the tourist. The section begins with the declaration that, “Pasta is the staple of the Italian diet”, before describing the various types of pasta noodles available and not much else.⁴⁵ These guidebooks were far more concerned with the attractions of Italy, rather than it’s the varying cuisine of the country, allowing for pasta and pizza to be branded as the national cuisine.

⁴² Urry, 132.

⁴³ Bemelmans, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁵ Irving R. Levine, *Main Street Italy*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965), 47.

The 1970s saw a dramatic shift in the guidebooks' emphasis on Italian cuisine in comparison to the previous years. Specifics about regional foods became more prevalent and began to play a larger role in the reflection of what was available throughout the country. However, the regional emphasis was not all-encompassing and focused on those popular areas such as Rome, Tuscany, Naples, and Venice. Small efforts towards an authentic experience surrounding food became more prevalent, providing the tourists with information not only on various cuisines available but the consumption habits of the Italians as well. Take, for example, the beginning of the food section for Rome in the 1977 *Italy A to Z*. The guide begins with, "As with other matters, one eats in Rome as the Romans do."⁴⁶ The paragraph then changes its language and discusses the ways in which Italians, generally, take their meals, in relation to the time they eat and how many courses they order, generalizing the Roman experience, which for the tourist provides a framework for how to partake as local.⁴⁷ Although the focus on culinary tourism was still small, discussions of cuisine in early guidebooks did emphasize experiences and actions which allowed the tourist to act like a local. This further influenced the motivations of tourists, beginning a slow shift to culinary tourism as the pathway to a more authentic experience.⁴⁸

These sources allowed for the tourist to shift their gaze towards the "Italianess" of the cuisine and its customs, while still only receiving a small glimpse into the complex culture of food in Italy. In 1970 Kate Simon, author of *Italy: The Places Between*, furthered the perception of experience in relation to Italian cuisine, describing an Italian meal as distinctly musical and prone to tradition, with no effort towards diversity.⁴⁹ Whereas Simon is less specific in her

⁴⁶ Robert S. Kane, *Italy A to Z: A Grand Tour of the Classic Cities*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 50. <https://archive.org/details/italytozgrandtou0000kane>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 50-51.

⁴⁸ MacCannell, 101.

⁴⁹ Kate Simon, *Italy: The Places in Between*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 95.

discussion regional cuisines, she elevates the experience that the tourist should seek out, allowing for the mind to develop expectations removed from food and applied to experience surrounding food. According to Dean MacCannell in his book *The Tourist*, by doing so, this guidebook supplied the tourist with a matrix based on a recommendation which the tourist then sought to fulfill.⁵⁰ These descriptions placed the burden of fulfillment on the hosts, and while the effects of this connection of Italian food to the theme of tradition will be further discussed later, these sources reflect a growing interest in tourist experience directly related to cuisine.

In the guidebooks of the 1980s, food began to take on a more specific role as a source for tourist experience. While travel solely based in culinary tourism remained limited, the shifting emphasis of even the smallest regional food marked the growth of cuisine as a way to experience authentic Italy. While some guidebooks, such as the 1986 *Collier's World Traveler Series Italy*, were less specific in their discussion of regional cuisine, others, such as 1984 *Fodor's* delved into the local cuisine at the end of each region, favoring areas such as Emilia-Romagna, specifically Parma and Bologna, Tuscany, Rome and Naples. These areas became the loci for the beginnings of culinary tourism within Italy, as areas which were gourmet in their cuisine and therefore the perfect destination for the gourmet traveler.⁵¹

Emilia-Romagna, and its cities, which produce those foods which we commonly associate as the broader Italian cuisine, parmesan cheese, and Bolognese, was promoted as the main destination for culinary tourists traveling to Italy. Fodor's referred to it as a destination for cuisine with, "the finest and most famous in Italy".⁵² Similarly, the 1985 *Rand McNally Italy* guide, which is less direct in its promotion of regional cuisine and culinary tourism, proclaimed

⁵⁰ MacCannell, 50.

⁵¹ *Fodor's Italy 1984*, (New York: Fodor's Travel Guides, 1984), 221.

⁵² *Ibid*, 216.

that Emilia-Romagna was “a region where it is considered no sin to ‘live to eat.’”⁵³ Each guidebook then highlighted the common goods of Parma and Bologna but failed to give the same distinction to other regions. Less concerned with the experience surrounding the food, these guidebooks attempted to provide an understanding of the regional cuisine but put in a better effort to emphasize those regions the tourists were more familiar with.

This must be acknowledged as an influence on the development of the tourist perception of Italian identity in relation to cuisine. While certain regions rose as the culinary marker of Italy, others faded to the back, allowing for tourists to apply their interactions with cuisine in places such as Naples and Emilia-Romagna broadly to the entire country. In this, the emphasis on culinary tourism developed specifically within the regions that produced products, such as cheese, olive oil, and wine, that the Americans were already familiar with and associated already as being distinctly Italian.⁵⁴ These products are some of the most popular imported Italian foods in America, for both Americans and Italian-Americans.⁵⁵ As a result, tourists were able to formulate their perception of Italian food and identity in a set framework that was already developed through experience with the modified Italian food from home. Given the biased promotion of cuisines from Tuscany, Naples, and particularly Emilia-Romagna, the tourist continued to receive a skewed perception of Italian cuisine. In the same way that the early guidebooks only placed pasta as the common sign of Italian food, the uneven promotion of regional cuisine, resulted in biased anticipation and desire on the part of the tourist of where to travel in Italy.⁵⁶

⁵³ Dorothy Daly, *Italy: A Rand McNally Pocket Guide*, (Rand McNally and Company, 1985), 60.

⁵⁴ Montanari, 45.

⁵⁵ Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table*, (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 157.

⁵⁶ Urry, 132.

Culinary tourism took off in the late '90s and into the early 2000s, connected to the development of the Slow Food movement. Italy and the food from its various regions took a new role in the tourist industry, as companies began to operate tours designed to provide an authentic Italian experience to the tourist. The shift during this time reflected efforts to move beyond the classic stereotypical foods of Italy, but still, preserve the "Italianess" of the experience. Important to regional development and the tourist perception of authenticity was the development of the Slow Food Movement. Founded in 1986 in Bra, Italy but catapulted in the 90s, slow food was a reactionary movement to the increasing globalization of cuisine.⁵⁷ The emphasis on the preservation of not only local cuisine but the tradition in its production and the experience in its consumption, attracted many tourists searching for authentic Italy.⁵⁸ Culinary tourism grew dramatically as the Slow Food movement itself put more emphasis on preserving the tradition of the local in relation to food and its production. Yet, many still feared that the deep involvement of tourists in regional and local culinary tourism would create the homogenization that Slow Food was attempting to combat, as the cuisine continually faced the challenge of shifting to fit the tourist expectations rather than actual traditional flavor.⁵⁹ This, in many ways, was an incredibly realistic fear, as tourist involvement in a destination, especially in

⁵⁷ Rana Foroohar, Stefan Theil, Scott Johnson, Barbie Nadeau, and Michelle Chan. "Eat, Drink and Go Slow." *Newsweek (Atlantic Edition)* 138, no. 1 (2001): <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=4755208&site=ehost-live.>; Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, trans. William McCuaig, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 8.

⁵⁸ Foroohar, *Newsweek*.

⁵⁹ Barbie Nadeau, "Now that's Italian! 'Culinary Tourism' is One of Travel Packagers' Newer Offerings. the Clients Don't Just Eat Lavishly, they also Learn how to Prepare the Best of Italy's Cuisine." (2001): <http://0link.galegroup.com/catalog/multcolib.org/apps/doc/A76165932/AONE?u=multnomah&sid=AONE&xid=9688ece2>.

deeper sectors of tourism, inherently developed a link between experience in that place and identity.⁶⁰

While Slow Food aimed for the preservation of local tradition and the opposition to the homogenization of cuisine, it unwittingly furthered the power of culinary tourism in the development and reinforcement of greater cultural stereotypes. The development of the Slow Food movement in relation to culinary tourism in a broader sense began to link the tropes of tradition and leisure to food and the stimulation of the senses.⁶¹ By doing so, the *la dolce vita* experience became more prominent in culinary interactions, and tourists were able to connect it to their perception of authentic experience in Italy and as a mark of localization.

While culinary tourism was developing within Italy itself, guidebooks were also becoming more specific to the culinary experience. A greater variety of guidebooks focused specifically on culinary experience in Italy began to appear in the 1990s and 2000s. These guides continued to package the experience itself in relation to cultural stereotypes. In the introduction of Daniel Halpern's 1990 *Halpern's Guide to the Essential Restaurants of Italy*, Halpern declares, "Another aspect of tradition is the institution of Mamma in the kitchen... more often than not Mamma remains part of the act, carrying on the old ways."⁶² Halpern claims that this traditional aspect of cuisine existed within almost every restaurant he visited. Painting this traditional image of cuisine as a family affair reinforced the thought that by partaking in food, one could access the tradition and culture of Italy. While Halpern's guide reinforced the theme of tradition connected to the stereotype of *la dolce vita*, the 1996 *Cheap Eats in Italy* by Sandra Gustafson reinforced

⁶⁰ C. Michael Hall, Richard Mitchell, and Liz Sharples, "Consuming Places: the role of food, wine and tourism in regional development", in *Food Tourism Around the World*, ed. C. Michael Hall, Liz Sharples, Richard Mitchell, Niki Macionis, Brock Cambourne (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003), 57.

⁶¹ Hom, 60.

⁶² Daniel Halpern, *Halpern's Guide to the Essential Restaurants of Italy*, (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1990), 3, <https://archive.org/details/halpernsguidetoe00halp>.

the theme of pleasure associated with the culture and cuisine of Italy, writing that when one wanted comfort, pure enjoyment or satisfaction, they ate Italian.⁶³ In 2002, the Touring Club of Italy also published their own guide, titled *The Italian Food Guide: the ultimate guide to the regional foods of Italy*. The guide was published in partnership with the Italian Department of Tourism and provided the tourist with information specifically on the regional foods and products of Italy. While the book focuses on the regional cuisine and local tradition, it also played a role in elevating cuisine as a way of accessing, “an authenticity not always found in conventional restaurants.”⁶⁴ Guides focused on the culinary experiences within Italy combined with the rise of Slow Food elevated the worth of culinary tourism and its value in accessing “authentic” Italian culture.

Guidebooks of the 21st century combined with the age of the internet now promote culinary tourism and the food of Italy specifically as one of the main reasons for tourists to travel to the country. Italian cuisine has become the main source for the tourist who wants to have a localized experience, access what they believe to be authentic Italy. Both commercial resources and the Italian state itself have so effectively connected Italian cuisine to that of identity, and the Italian culture and lifestyle, that the gastronomic experience has become the benchmark for authenticity.⁶⁵ However, the tourist experience is still maintained through recommendations from guidebooks, and now more often, online sources as well. Tourist apps, like that of Lonely Planet, provide the tourists with instant access to the best restaurants and sights at the touch of a finger. The guidebooks themselves still reflect the same style as those from the 1980s. *Lonely Planet*,

⁶³ Sandra Gustafson, *Cheap Eats in Italy*, (San Francisco: Chronical Books, 1996), 9, <https://archive.org/details/cheapeatsinitaly00sand>

⁶⁴ Touring Club Italiano, *The Italian food guide: the ultimate guide to the regional foods of Italy*, (Milan: Touring Editore, 2002), 18. <https://archive.org/details/italianfoodguide00tour>.

⁶⁵ Karim Ab Shahrin and Christina Geng-Qing Chi, “Culinary Tourism as a Destination Attraction: AN Empirical Examination of Destinations’ Food Image”, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management* 19, no. 6 (2010): 534.

Frommers, and *National Geographic Traveler*, to name a few, provide discourse over cuisine from various regions, but still provide deeper emphasis on areas such as Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Veneto, and Naples. *Lonely Planet* (2014), for example, provides a suggestion for a food tour specifically for Emilia-Romagna, but no other regions.⁶⁶ The trend of unequal regional promotion did not dissipate in relation to the development of culinary tourism but rather gained momentum.

Further, the cuisine is now being sold to the tourist as a way to experience the secrets of Italy and move “off the beaten path”. These experiences are portrayed as a way for the true gourmet tourist to partake in a richer culinary tourism experience, away from the other typical tourists. Online articles such as “50+ Secret Things to do in Italy”, “Undiscovered Italy”, and “Eat Like a Local in Italy” all further the concept for the tourist that the best way to access any true authenticity is through cuisine.⁶⁷ This, in many ways, contributes to the shifting concept of what authentic experience is in Italy in relation to cuisine. As more and more tourists, particularly those involved in culinary tourism, attempt to connect with authentic Italy, these shifting promotions make it nearly impossible to distinguish what is truly authentic and what is staged authenticity.⁶⁸

Food has taken a primary role in the promotion of Italy by the Italian tourism board as well. Cuisine has become a part of the national brand of Italy, so much so that 2018 was deemed the “Year of Italian Food” by the Italian Tourism Board.⁶⁹ On the Italian Tourism Board website, the abstract for the section on gastronomy puts forward those typical Italian items such as

⁶⁶ Cristian Bonetto, *Lonely Planet Italy*, (Lonely Planet Publications: 2014), 44.

⁶⁷ CNT Editors, “50+ Secret Things to do in Italy,” *Conde Nast Traveler*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/secret-things-to-do-in-italy>; Nancy Harmon Jenkins, “Undiscovered Italy”, *Food & Wine*, May 01, 2000, <https://www.foodandwine.com/articles/undiscovered-italy>;

⁶⁸ MacCannell, 101.

⁶⁹ “Gastronomy”, Italian Tourism Board, <http://www.italia.it/en/travel-ideas/gastronomy.html>

mozzarella, parmesan cheese and truffles for examples of regional products, but ends the paragraph by declaring pizza and pasta as synonymous with Italy.⁷⁰ Ultimately, culinary tourism within Italy and emphasis on national cuisine must still appeal to the sustained expectations of the tourists traveling, resulting in the necessity to promote those culinary objects and regions which produce those "Italian" cuisines developed in the tourist mind.

The manipulation of the national cuisine is directly related to the tastes and experiences the tourist is already familiar with. Although many more people today travel to Italy to experience “authentic” Italian culture through culinary tourism, plenty of tourists still gravitate towards those foods they view as low risk and highly likely to taste good.⁷¹ These experiences, which allow for the development of familiarity, generally arise from encounters with Italian cuisine at home. Given that the most prevalent Italian food in America is that of spaghetti Bolognese and pizza, by promoting these foods, the Italian government is signaling familiarity and low risk in the culinary offerings for the tourist. In an ad done by the Italian Tourism board, titled “Italy: The Excellences of the Extraordinary Country”, the portrayal of cuisine is limited to that of pizza and pasta.⁷² By highlighting these two foods, it becomes simpler for the tourist to develop a limited understanding of national cuisine.

Ultimately, the development of culinary tourism in Italy over time has resulted in an uneven promotion of regions, which has affected not only the perception of Italian food for the tourist but the economic growth of Italy as well. Higher tourism rates can be tracked throughout Emilia-Romagna, Venice, and Tuscany than in small countries.⁷³ While Venice is known as a popular

⁷⁰ Italian Tourism Board, “Gastronomy”.

⁷¹ Mak, Lumbers and Eves, 184.

⁷² *Italy: The Excellences of an Extraordinary Country*, Italian National Tourism Board, (2018).
https://youtu.be/Lgky_SegXoM

⁷³ Marco Fortis and Cristiana Crenna, “Italian Tourism in the Age of Globalization,” in *The Pillars of the Italian Economy: manufacturing, food & wine, tourism*, ed. Marco Fortis (Springer, 2016): 330.

tourist site outside of culinary tourism, much of the success of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany can be attributed to their role as locations for culinary tourism. Throughout the years, these two regions were the most consistently promoted as areas of distinguishable Italian cuisine, and as a result are the most common areas visited by tourists seeking out a culinary experience in Italy.⁷⁴ The regional disparity becomes more relevant in its connection to the issue of the economic differences between the North and the South. The predominant culinary regions lie in the north of Italy, and although much of the food in the north was influenced by the migration of southern Italians and their food habits, the south remains the poorer, less emphasized area.

Further, the reflection of Italian cuisine outside of Italy, based on its exports, also plays a role in the regional development and perception of Italian food outside of the country. Economically, by connecting tourism with the national and regional cuisine, there is an expectation that the connection will be reflected in the demand for those products from the tourist destination, in this case, Italy, from those tourists who have returned home.⁷⁵ While tourist interaction in Italy based in the food and its identities play a significant role in economic development, tourists become a part of how the local food identity is shaped, as terms such as “local” and “regional” only begin to take shape once an outsider interacts with it.⁷⁶ Intrinsicly, this process is allowed to occur through globalization, which in many ways is ironic, as culinary tourism in Italy has developed as a way to reclaim the authentic and tradition in tourist experience.

While the development of culinary tourism within Italy has favored particular flavors and regions, resulting in a simultaneously broad and constricting image of Italian national cuisine for the tourist, the description and way in which the experience surrounding food is promoted have

⁷⁴ “Eating”, Lonely Planet.

⁷⁵ C. Michael Hall, “Consuming Places” 59.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 26.; Montanari, 69.

also linked the cuisine to the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita*. This moves beyond which cuisine the tourist partakes in, and rather the experience they expect in their interaction with cuisine in Italy. In relation to food, the stereotype is reinforced through the promotion of three themes: family, love and tradition. In this sense, tourists began to relate experiences connected to the consumption of food as a mark of authenticity and views cuisine as the best way to access true Italian culture. Therefore, the tourist experience with cuisine, to be deemed authentic, relies on the tourist experiencing “traditional”, “home-spun” cuisine passed down for generations, filling the soul and heart.

These tropes appear for the tourist in both textual and visual form. Guidebooks and online articles utilize lively description and the development of an imaginary that produces, in the tourist mind, anticipation and desire for the experience described to them.⁷⁷ Through these mediums, the tourist gaze becomes romanticized, as the quest for authentic cuisine experience in Italy becomes reliant on the ability to match the expectations of the tourist and to fulfill their senses, in both taste, visuals, and feeling.⁷⁸

Perhaps the most common perception of Italy in relation to food is that of family and the resulting localization that occurs when the tourist consumes home-cooked food. When one thinks of Italian food, it is far too simple to imagine an Italian grandmother or mother working away in the kitchen, preparing a feast for her family. The family then comes together over the meal, and as such, to the tourist, cuisine appears as the pinnacle of authentic experience. This theme of family and tradition is one of the most prevalent in the promotion of culinary tourism and experience with food in Italy. As more tourists move to experience Italy “off the beaten path”,

⁷⁷ MacCannell, 48; Hom, 53.

⁷⁸ Urry, 138.

many seek out those culinary opportunities which place them in with locals in order to experience “authentic” culture.

Culinary experiences promoted by guidebooks and travel articles tend to be ones that provide the tourist with advice on how to access those traditional, homespun meals, aiding the culinary tourist in their quest for authenticity. Further, the descriptive language used is influential in the perception and expectation that the tourist brings with them on their culinary adventures. Take, for example, a snippet from the article "The Best Restaurants in Venice", by Russell Norman for *Conde Nast Traveller*:

The difference between home cooking and restaurant is simply a question of attitude. The former is heartfelt and generous, born of love, warmth, tradition and a sense of abundance. The latter counts precision, consistency, and expertise among its virtues. Much has been written about the smartest restaurants, but the places the locals tend to go to, which have the most wonderful homespun recipes, are the places I tend to favor too.⁷⁹

In this description, Norman places a higher value on the homespun recipes, promoting those places which will give the tourist access to the local fare and therefore, an entrance into the local culture. This is important for two reasons, as Norman not only promotes to the tourist a superior image of home-cooking and tradition but access to local "secrets", which provides the tourist with a sense of authentic experience.⁸⁰ The home-cooking fulfills those feelings of love and tradition, protected from globalization and the constantly changing cultural sphere. By attributing these feelings to the cuisine, in juxtaposition to the “smartest restaurants”, the tourist is able to build a superior image of “authentic” Italian food as being homespun in the mind.⁸¹ While the article is specific to the restaurants of Venice, feeling or experience in relation to the cuisine can be applied anywhere in Italy. Norman continues his article, emphasizing the distinction between

⁷⁹ Russell Norman, “The Best Restaurants in Venice,” *Conde Nast Traveller*, August 24, 2018, <https://www.cntraveller.com/gallery/best-restaurants-in-venice>

⁸⁰ MacCannell, 101.

⁸¹ Urry, 133.

locals and tourist actions, highlighting those family-run restaurants, allowing the tourist an entrance into the "backstage" and access authenticity.⁸² This connection to home-cooking is especially effective in creating a sense of authentic experience because, in the tourist mind, that is how the food is supposed to be prepared.⁸³

The descriptions used by Norman and his emphasis on restaurants that produce home-cooking and the feeling of family is not unique. Many other travel sources link the concept of home-cooking and family-run businesses to a truer source of Italian authenticity, and therefore a connection to the locals. Generally, the locations that are the most authentic are those hidden away with little to no signage and run by families, as described by both *Lonely Planet* (2014) and *Collier World Traveler Series: Italy* (1986).⁸⁴ The gap in time between these two publications proves that while culinary tourism itself was not prominent until the end of the '90s, the image and expectations of Italian food have developed in the tourist mind for a significant period of time. Descriptions that connect the family to the food, and therefore the overall experience exist in multiple works. As discussed previously, early guidebooks rarely emphasized food as an experience, but on the rare occasion that they did, many described ones run by families, such as Kate Simon in *Italy: The Places in Between* (1970). While her focus on food is little to none, when she did write about cuisine, she generally highlighted those experiences of family and the local, such as when she describes a trattoria in Siena which is popular with locals, saying "mama, papa, and all the kids work like grinning happy slaves, clearing, clattering, serving, conversing and above their noise, the shouted conversation of clients."⁸⁵ She continues on to describe the

⁸² MacCannell, 101.

⁸³ Jeffery M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 15.

⁸⁴ *Collier World Traveler Series: Italy*, ed. Philippe Gloaguen and Pierre Josse (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 9.; Bonetto, *Lonely Planet Italy*, 445.

⁸⁵ Simon, 49.

menu as household style, joining the experience of the trattoria to its simple food. When the tourist reads descriptions such as these, it allows for the mind to create a sense of desire and expectation.⁸⁶ Thus, tourists begin to understand the most authentic experiences, and therefore the most desirable, as those which fulfill the expectation of familial signposting and the feeling of entering Italy as a local through the consumption of this cuisine.

This desire by the tourist must be met in order for the trip to be deemed a success, and therefore more tourist companies are shifting to meet this expectation of a home-cooked experience. One specific company, Le Cesarine, now offers the experience for tourists to come to the homes of *cesarine* – “empresses of the kitchen” – where they will learn to prepare the home-cooked meals they have daydreamed of.⁸⁷ This integration of the tourist directly into the home of the local allows for the tourist to fulfill their desire to partake in the local culture directly and enter authentic Italy. However, it is hard to distinguish this experience as truly authentic, as it is arguably still staged with the tourist in mind.⁸⁸ It is not to say that what the tourist will consume is inauthentic in any way, but rather it is a form of authentic experience built for the tourist directly, which minimizes the opportunity for mere experience, that is, a tourist experience which is less likely to be mystified or influenced by touristic features, which is arguably more authentic.⁸⁹

On the surface, the trope of family and localization in culinary tourism appears to have no relation to the stereotyping of Italian culture. However, when the tourist attempts to take apart in culinary experiences that focus on homespun feeling and a deeper level of localization, they

⁸⁶ Urry, 132.

⁸⁷ “Home Food Italy” *Travel + Leisure*, <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-guide/bologna-emilia-romagna/things-to-do/home-food-italy>

⁸⁸ MacCannell, 100.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 102.

believe themselves to be experiencing the true “authentic” culture of Italy, *la dolce vita*, which is removed from the globalized and homogenized tourist Italy. In this way, the tourist furthers this concept, as they view this experience as an acquisition of aesthetic taste and distinct from other “traditional” tourists.⁹⁰ Therefore, they have connected access to Italian culture to the senses, gaining a piece of the sweet life by partaking in cuisine as the locals do.

Another common trope connected to Italian culture and cuisine is that of love and pleasure. This trope plays directly on the senses to exploit the pleasure derived from consuming Italian cuisine. The theme also plays on the opportunities of love which are assumed to abound over an Italian meal. This theme tends to develop a more romanticized gaze from tourists, leading to Italian food and culinary tourism attempting to fulfill the invented pleasure and authenticity that derives from it.⁹¹ Culinary tourism is successful when it plays on the themes of love and pleasure because it invites the tourist to remove themselves from the constraints of their everyday lives and partake in the intense pleasures and opportunities available with little to no regret. One of the main facets of tourism is the ability to go away, partake in what is seemingly out of the ordinary, and then return to normal life.⁹² These themes are also an essential aspect to the reinforcement of the stereotype *la dolce vita*, as accessing this pleasure allows for the sensory stimulation which opens the tourist up to the sweet excess of Italian culture.⁹³

By divulging in the gluttonous offerings of Italy, tourists attempt to access an authentic Italy, as it is seen that by taking part in the pleasure of the food, they are experiencing Italy as the locals do. This concept can be seen in the descriptions of food which place the consumption as a

⁹⁰ Hom, 61.

⁹¹ Urry, 138.

⁹² Ibid, 130.

⁹³ Hom, 59.

way to share in Italian greed and experience everything deeply.⁹⁴ As told to the tourist in the 2014 *Lonely Planet*, there is no gluttony in consuming the wonderful cuisine in Italy, as the Italians themselves consume their cuisine with passion in their everyday life, and it is seen as essential to take part in that same pleasure for anyone traveling to Italy.⁹⁵

On the more idealistic end of the spectrum of this theme is the literal connection to love, in the sense that through Italian cuisine, one has the ability to make connections with a significant other. In the article “The Accidental Apprentice”, Jason Hammel tells the story of how he ran off to Italy, where he met “the girl with the figs”, who taught him the slow way of cooking and the slow way of life.⁹⁶ While unclear by the end of the article the nature of the relationship, their connection opened him up to the slow Italian way of life, which at the end of the article separates him from others, saying “It was July, and the tourists looked at us with envy. *See*, I could hear one man saying, *look at how they live*”.⁹⁷ Similar to the localization that occurs in the trope of family, the pleasure derived from this experience, allowed Hammel to move deeper into authentic Italy. This theme is marketed to tourists traveling to Italy by the Italian Tourism Board as well. In the video advertisement run for the 2018 Year of Food Campaign, placed between the images of food, a man feeds a woman spaghetti in a gentle way with a loving expression on his face.⁹⁸ While it appears inconsequential at first glance, this image promotes Italian food and experience with the ability to be connected to romantic experience, acting as a

⁹⁴ Simon, 96.

⁹⁵ Bonetto, 39.

⁹⁶ Jason Hammel, “The Accidental Apprentice,” *Bon Appétit*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.bonappetit.com/story/the-accidental-apprentice>.

⁹⁷ Hammel, “The Accidental Apprentice”.

⁹⁸ *Anno del Cibo Italiano 2018 – Year of Italian Food 2018 – 90*, Italia. It, (2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLHgvyYLilc>.

signpost which constructs the tourist gaze in a way which allows us to view culinary experience within Italy as related to romance and typical of Italian culture.⁹⁹

The third trope connected to Italian food and is that of tradition. Similar to the theme of family, this trope, used in culinary tourism, allows for the promotion of the traditional way of life which can be accessed through cuisine. This trope heavily plays on the concept that authentic Italian food and the culinary experience itself are removed from globalization and the influences of mass tourism.¹⁰⁰ This theme is commonly seen in the *agriturismi*, slow food experiences, and “secret” Italy. When tourists partake in these forms of culinary tourism, they are able to develop a perception of Italian culture which connects the food to the preservation of tradition, the sweetness of life and *la dolce far niente*, which translates to “the sweet art of idleness”.¹⁰¹

Many travel articles deal with culinary tourism in Italy by elevating the experiences which are based on tradition and preservation of "traditional" Italian culture. The location also plays an important role in this theme, as those locations which are rural or "off the beaten path" are less likely to have been affected by mass tourism and are, therefore "secrets" of an authentic Italy. This language can be seen in the article "50 + Secret Things to Do in Italy", in which many of the restaurants recommended are outside of the main tourist area, or located on farmland outside the city.¹⁰² Therefore, the perception of authentic Italian food in the tourist imagination also becomes attached to the places in which the food can be found, placing a higher value of authenticity based on the location.

Connected to the concept of tradition in location, *agriturismi* is also a culinary experience that plays on its location and preservation of culture to attract tourists and provide an authentic

⁹⁹ Urry, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 21.

¹⁰¹ Hom, 52.

¹⁰² CNT Editors, “50+ Secret Things to Do in Italy”

experience. After the approval of agriturismo in the '90s, the Italian state began to promote cuisine as an essential aspect of tourism in the destination.¹⁰³ *Agriturismo* allowed for any Italian who owned land and a farmhouse to convert it into a bed and breakfast, while the Italian government stipulated that the farms must both produce something and teach something to the tourists who came.¹⁰⁴ The consumption of Italian food by the tourist moves the cuisine from local to national, and attributes it to the community, creating in a sense, a gastro-nationalism that the Italian government promotes as a part of its national image as a whole.¹⁰⁵

Agriturismo is generally promoted as an essential experience for any tourist who is seeking both delicious authentic food and Italian tradition. In articles published by *Travel + Leisure*, *New York Times*, and *Rick Steve's Europe*, *agriturismi* is commonly described as a traditional experience for the tourist that allows them to enter deeper to the heart of Italian culture and partake in the culinary wonders of the various regions while “slowing down” and moving away from mass tourism.¹⁰⁶ Tourists are able to read these articles and deem these experiences as more authentic because of the emphasis not only on their location “off the beaten path”, but also to their ability to take part in the harvesting of olives or the hunting of truffles, or learn how to make pasta with the mother of the family who owns the farm - this image is far removed from the globalization of the modern world. *Agriturismo* themselves are tourist sets, so while it appears that this experience is a step closer to true authentic Italy, it is instead created

¹⁰³ Nadeau, “Now That’s Italian”.

¹⁰⁴ Nadeau, “Now That’s Italian”.

¹⁰⁵ Chi, 51, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Anya Von Bremzen, “Agriturismo: Italy’s Best Affordable Spots”, *Travel + Leisure*, June 15, 2011, <https://www.travelandleisure.com/slideshows/agriturismi-italys-best-affordable-spots>; Shivani Vora, “These Olive Oil Estates and Wineries in Italy Would Love You to Stay the Night,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/30/travel/italy-olive-oil-estates-wineries-overnight-stays.html>; Rick Steves, “Escape to the Italian Countryside”, *Rick Steve's Europe*, <https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/read/articles/escape-to-the-italian-countryside>

with that concept in mind.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the *agriturismi* across Italy all supply tourists with an authentic experience developed with the tourist consumer in mind that fulfills their expectations of *la dolce vita* and provides them with a sense of localization.

It would be impossible to discuss the theme of tradition and the “slow life” without examining Slow Food and the role it has played in the development of culinary tourism in Italy. Slow Food itself was a response to globalization, so partaking in any slow food event or traveling to “slow cities” itself poses, for the tourist, as an inherently authentic culinary experience. Magazine articles on Slow Food revere the movement and highlight it as a must for any tourist seeking a truly traditional encounter. An article from *The Atlantic* by Cody Kummer states that “Perhaps the reason for slow food’s popularity is its aim to celebrate and preserve...”, continuing on to highlight precision and care that has been, and will continue to be, passed down throughout generations of an Italian family which runs a mill.¹⁰⁸ Kummer concludes that “old and slow is better”, praising the tradition and authenticity of the work. In “Eat, Drink and Go Slow”, Slow Food is revealed to not only act as a source of preservation for tradition but an effective promoter of tourism as well. The Mayor of Greve, the first Slow City, was quoted saying, “...legislating la dolce vita has actually ensured the economic future of the city.”, emphasizing that Slow Food in its existence and use as a tourist tool relies on these themes of slow, leisurely tradition.¹⁰⁹ As more tourists seek out authentic experiences in travel, partaking in

¹⁰⁷ MacCannell, 101.

¹⁰⁸ Corby Kummer, “Food: Doing Good by Eating Well”, *The Atlantic*, March, 1999. http://0-go.galegroup.com.catalog.multcolib.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T003&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=4&docId=GALE%7CA53871634&docType=Article&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=&prodId=AONE&contentSet=GALE%7CA53871634&searchId=R2&userGroupName=multnomah&inPS=true

¹⁰⁹ Foroohar, *Newsweek*.

agriturismi and Slow Food become essential or worthy for the tourist to be involved in, as it is repeatedly promoted and signposted as such.¹¹⁰

As admitted by the Mayor of Greve, Slow Food and *agriturismi* as well, are reliant on providing the *la dolce vita* experience to the tourists they accommodate. Tradition and leisure, which are reminiscent of the past, pose as essential aspects for fulfilling the expectation of the tourists, who view it as necessary to their authentic Italian encounter. Authenticity in this sense becomes mystified, as it must fulfill the expectations of the tourist, and it becomes harder to distinguish between reality and a production for the outsider.¹¹¹ In this way, culinary tourism in Italy continually relies on the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita* and the themes of tradition, family, and love to produce the authentic encounters and feelings the tourist has come to expect.

Along with guidebooks and the internet, films also play an influential role in the development of the tourist gaze and the resulting cultural stereotyping of Italy. The same themes of family, tradition, and romance are connected to Italian cuisine when it is portrayed in films. The visualization of these themes makes it easier for the consumer watching to form perceptions while attributing experience to cuisine allows the consumer to attribute culinary experience as the most authentic way to access Italian culture.

This theme of family and the resulting entrance of the tourist into the local culture is prevalent in films based in Italy. While written works provide a description, and are based more often than not, in reality, films have the ability to warp reality and therefore promote far more idealized concepts of culinary experience in Italy. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, an American tourist, Francis, travels to Tuscany and, given her mess of a life in America, decides to purchase a villa in the countryside. While the film is not centered on Francis's culinary experiences, her transition

¹¹⁰ Urry, 139.

¹¹¹ MacCannell, 93.

to becoming a local is connected to her ability to cook Italian food.¹¹² When she learns to cook from the mother of her neighbor, Placido, she is able to move deeper into Italy and become more localized, releasing her American past. A large part of her becoming localized was reliant on her ability to cook and feed her pseudo-family, allowing for those who watch the movie to understand food as essential to experiencing an authentic Italy.

In a similar vein, this same theme of localization through food can be seen in *Eat Pray Love*. Similar to Francis, the main character of this film, Liz, escapes to Italy from her relatively messy American life. Designated the *eat* section of her journey, Liz is able to connect with the locals and further her integration into authentic Italy by partaking in the cuisine. It is over food that she learns the language and forges bonds with her friends, which seemingly become her pseudo-family.¹¹³ In this instance, the tourist once again is able to see food as the most accessible point into an authentic Italy masked by mass tourism. It is not only in films set in Italy, but films about Italian American experience as well, such as *Goodfellas*, that place food as essential to family and the Italian experience. In *Goodfellas*, food plays a central role in the preservation of Italian experience, seen when Henry and Paul are in jail and they are still able to make Italian food and live a pleasant life, smuggling in foods like salami, cheese, and prosciutto.¹¹⁴ Italian food is intrinsically connected to family and as a way to bond with others, regardless of the situation. These images allow for the tourist to perceive Italian food and experience as synonymous with family, resulting in the reinforcement of this theme and its greater role in the cultural stereotype of Italy.

¹¹² *Under the Tuscan Sun*, directed by Audrey Wells (2003; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures, 2004), DVD.

¹¹³ *Eat Pray Love*, directed by Ryan Murphy (2010; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2010), DVD.

¹¹⁴ *Goodfellas*, directed by Martin Scorsese (1990; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros, 1997), DVD.

Films also play a role in promoting the romantic theme of the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita*. Italian Food in film has the ability to bring people together and more often than not, is the base for the foundation of relationships. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, in which Pawal and Chiara meet while harvesting olives and they quickly form a relationship which ends in their marriage at the end of the film. Their chance meeting in a setting connected to food allows for the tourist to place a romantic value on culinary opportunities such as harvesting grapes or wine, though this experience is highly unlikely to occur for any regular tourist.¹¹⁵ Another film, *Letters to Juliet*, sees the main characters Sophie and Charlie bond and begin forming a romantic connection while eating gelato.¹¹⁶ In *Lady and the Tramp*, the two dogs form their connection over a plate of spaghetti while two Italian chefs sing to them, romanticizing the experience even further.¹¹⁷ A similar experience is seen in the film *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, when two characters, Kate and Ethan, bond at the end of the film and are able to open up to each other over a plate of spaghetti and meatballs.¹¹⁸ In these films, the romance itself is connected to common foods, signaling to the tourist that they do not need to go out of their way to access the romantic aspect of Italian culture through food. The opportunity and development of love in all these films are connected to the simple pleasure of the food. These connections were formed through chance meetings, but the food itself is what brought them together. When the tourist consumes these commercial resources, they aid in the creation of signs which continue to label Italy and its food as a source of love and pleasure.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ MacCannell, 97.

¹¹⁶ *Letters to Juliet*, directed by Gary Winick (2010; Santa Monica, CA: Summit Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

¹¹⁷ *Lady and the Tramp*, directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske (1955; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2012), DVD.

¹¹⁸ *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, directed by Jim Fall, (2003; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures, 2003), DVD.

¹¹⁹ Urry, 133.

While those works connect the experience of partaking in Italian food as a source in which one can access love in a more literal sense, consuming the cuisine has also been developed to symbolize intense pleasure. This theme is best portrayed in *Eat Pray Love*, in which the main character uses food as a substitute for literal love. Specifically, this can be seen in the juxtaposition of Liz and her seemingly sensual consumption of a plate of spaghetti after watching an Italian couple make out. When she is done with the meal, she looks around with a slight look of guilt and embarrassment, as if the pleasure she derived from the meal was perhaps too extreme for the public sphere. This culinary experience then opens Liz up to the pleasure and simplicity of the Italian people themselves and she is able fully to experience the culture of Italy and *la dolce vita*.

These films romanticize the cuisine within Italy by connecting culinary experience and the pleasure derived in it as a way to share in Italy as a local would. This aspect of cultural stereotype of Italy is heavily tied to the stimulation of the senses, in which the Italians are perceived as feeling and eating everything with a deep sense of pleasure.¹²⁰ In this sense, authentic experience is achieved simply by consuming the cuisine of the area, although there is some risk involved in the fulfillment. For the pleasure to be achieved, the food must suit the taste of the tourist, requiring some sense of familiarity, which is also connected to the preference of certain foods which the tourist has been exposed to previously.¹²¹ The burden to fulfill this authenticity then results in the promotion of those foods which the tourist is familiar with and see frequently within the films related to Italy, leading to the overarching theme of pasta and pizza as essential Italian dishes. Therefore, tourists begin to search out those foods which provide this pleasure, resulting in consumers not necessarily look for authentic cuisine, but rather those

¹²⁰ Hom, 61.

¹²¹ Mak, Lumbers and Eves, 185.

dishes they are already accustomed to and have seen promoted as providing that source of authentic pleasure or feeling.¹²²

What the tourist deems as authentic Italian food and experience developed over time, by the mixing of cuisines due to migration between the north and south and the growth of mass tourism within the country. The development of tourism and the resulting promotion of cuisine, partnered with influence by Italian-American food and perceptions, allowed for the creation of certain ideals of authenticity in relation to Italy which were encapsulated in the cultural stereotype of *la dolce vita*.¹²³ By attributing the themes of pleasure, leisure, and tradition to cuisine, culinary tourism was able to provide tourists with what appeared to be easier access into authentic Italy. The stereotype of Italy became the symbol of authenticity which was then utilized by these commercial sources and the Italian government to further promote culinary tourism. It was in this promotion that tourists could develop expectations for those “authentic” culinary experiences, which needed to be continually met in order for the tourist to deem it as a success.¹²⁴

Further, it was those areas which provided cuisines that were familiar in taste to the tourist through experience as home which aided in the development of a skewed understanding of Italian national cuisine. Regions with iconic food products, pasta and pizza are able to dominate in culinary tourism because of their familiarity in the everyday life of the tourist. Therefore, the promotion of these foods is unequal in comparison to other regions and their specialties. This results in the constant reinforcement of the tourists’ perception of Italy and thus forces the creation of staged authentic experiences for the tourist to take part in, in order to be

¹²² Pilcher, Planet Taco, 227.

¹²³ Pilcher, Planet Taco, 132.

¹²⁴ Urry, 132.

satisfied. The promotion of familiar tastes and an idealized authentic experience through commercial resources shifted the burden of fulfillment onto Italy, which responded by providing access to experiences which in many ways All of this is not to say that there is no authentic experience to be had in Italy, but rather, that the continued promotion of culinary tourism in conjunction with a cultural stereotype that paints Italy as a land of leisure and tradition as necessary to authentic experience has resulted in the development of staged authentic experiences meant for the tourist instead. Mass tourism within Italy has grown with globalization, constantly finding ways to present itself and its food as authentic to the experience of leisure and *la dolce vita* in Italy in order to fulfill the expectations of those traveling there. For the tourist to access the authentic experience they are drawn to, they must look past this mystification and the seemingly authentic and open themselves up to mere experience.

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