

Festivals, Farmer's Markets and More

How Centers Create the Experience Critical to Culinary Tourism — Part II

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LAST MONTH WE EXPLORED THE STRENGTH OF CULINARY TOURISM, HOW TO DEVELOP A PROGRAM AND GAVE A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES OF HOW SHOPPING CENTERS CAPITALIZE ON THIS MARKET. This month we will go more in depth on the “why” of culinary tourism, give more shopping center examples and explain what a FoodTrekker is.

Why Culinary Tourism?

As noted last month, dining is consistently in tourists' top three activities. Nearly 100% eat out while traveling, some as many as three times a day. Plus, it is a year-round attraction not hindered by weather! Most important, shopping centers are in a terrific position to capitalize on this trend once they understand it.

The challenge is to make dining at your restaurants and cafes a “culinary experience.” Travelers are on a constant quest for these experiences. Why not create them at your shopping center? Many centers have.

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Some centers are creating the experiences through food festivals, cook-offs, cooking classes, farmer's markets, celebrity appearances and more. How can you promote your restaurants through your city and/or county effort?

In our first article, we looked at how Santa Barbara, CA, takes advantage of this market. The “Get Fresh” culinary tourism campaign started with research that demonstrated the strength of this travel niche in their market. Next they

coordinated a culinary tourism summit to introduce the concept to potential partners. The 90 attendees represented restaurants, accommodations, wineries, catering companies and arts organizations. The first piece, a 30-page Culinary Travel Planner, listed 150 regional culinary attractions and tours.

The next step was to develop the website, which not only included the Travel Planner but also culinary lodging packages, itineraries, events, festivals and recipes. Some of the packages included Ambrosia in Paradise; Backwoods Barbecue; Chef for a Day, and Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and You.

The campaign was supported by a public relations effort, participation in trade shows and conventions, sales missions, advertising and promotions. More on this multi-leveled campaign can be found on their website, www.santabarbaraca.com/culinary.

Let's return to Destin, FL, and Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort where in part one of our article we discovered their Annual Gumbo Cook-off at The Market Shops and the Annual Sandestin Wine Festival at The Village at Baytowne



Phillips Seafood at The Pier Shops at Caesar's.

Wharf. It does not stop there. Every year, the Market Shops also introduces the new French wines during their Beaujolais Nouveau Holiday Kick-off Festival. This past year the 6th Annual Festival was kicked off in the gazebo courtyard with a special toast, the tasting of the wines and a French country walkabout featuring tables of French-inspired cuisine. I had the pleasure of attending, and what a wonderful experience of tasting the new wines and enjoying delicious cuisine under a beautiful starlit night! Most of the stores stayed open, so I was able to get in some Christmas shopping as well. Tickets were sold online for \$45 and at the door for \$50, with a portion of the proceeds going to United Way Agency, Covenant Hospice of North-west FL.

“Sandestin's Beaujolais Nouveau Holiday Kick-off is a wonderful way to experience new wines, honoring an old, cherished tradition,” said Rebecca Job, director of commercial property operations.

continued on page 4

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Culinary Tourism

Continued from page 3

Traditionally, at one minute past midnight on the third Thursday in November in Beaujolais, a beautiful area in France sandwiched between the Rhone and Saone Rivers, trucks leave the Beaujolais vineyard for Lyon and Paris with the year's Beaujolais Nouveau for the day's celebration. French law prohibits the release of the Beaujolais Nouveau before this time. Since 1859, the fine wines of Beaujolais vineyards have been carried to the market in Beaune and auctioned off to benefit the town's hospices. "We are proud to be a part of such a unique event, one that still creates lasting memories and will always be rooted in tradition," said Job.

Entire Resort Benefits

The entire resort capitalizes on this travel niche by promoting all its dining options as a reason to vacation at Sandestin. Coleen Kirsch, PR manager for Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, explained, "Year after year, visitors flock to the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast from all over the world. It has also become a destination for diverse flavors, with more and more acclaimed restaurants adding to the area's repertoire."

Kirsch actively promotes to travel writers the vast array of dining options, from casual to fine dining. "Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort is truly a food lover's dream, with dozens of quaint restaurants and eateries throughout The Village of Baytowne Wharf, a 28-acre pedestrian village, as well as The

Market Shops at Sandestin. Coupled with the beautiful beaches and award-winning accommodations, Sandestin is a complete destination where guests can return again and again to experience something new in cuisine and other activities," she explained.

How did the resort get such a fine collection of eateries? Director of Commercial Property Leasing Kim Duke-Layden says, "We try to find the best operator possible in each of the selected categories. Since they are often from outside our market area, we invite them to see what a wonderful area they have an opportunity to open a business in. Being able to cater to both an upscale local population as well as to the masses of visitors is usually enough to seal the deal!"

Not Just Restaurants

Leasing goes beyond just finding the best operators in each category, but also seeks out unique tenants as well. A great example is the "Beyond the Grape" store at The Market Shops. This boutique sells wines made from a variety of Florida-grown fruits. This makes the perfect gift item! Additionally, The Market Shops store Kitchenique offers cooking classes that are special private cooking events for groups that include local, celebrity and touring chefs. For wine enthusiasts, Lumpy's Wine Bar and Bottle Shop just opened at The Village.

For more information, check out: www.sandestin.com and click on dining/shopping/entertainment.

Another shopping center

that focused its leasing to offer a culinary experience is the new The Pier Shops at Caesar's in Atlantic City, NJ. Marketing and Sponsorship Director Vicki Weiss explains, "Our focus is on a strong upscale fashion brand as well as an exceptional dining experience, so we developed the positioning statement 'Taste Fashion,' which delivers the message of who we are." Their restaurants are strategically placed on the third level of the Pier, and many offer a view of the Atlantic Ocean. The leasing team found concepts from the most popular restaurateurs in Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Each offers a diverse menu and innovative décor, creating an international restaurant row set atop (literally) the Atlantic Ocean.

"Future tourism marketing plans call for further capitalizing on this culinary experience by packaging the dining experience and coordinating dining promotions," said Weiss.

Take Advantage of Foodtrekker

Last month we promised to explain what the Foodtrekker is and how your restaurants can participate. First, look at the website for The International Culinary Tourism Association: www.culinarytourism.org/. It reminds you of the five steps to developing a culinary program: discover, learn, connect, develop and promote. This and my last article have covered the first four steps and have provided ideas on what you can do to develop your program. But, how about promoting it?

One easy way is through a program called FoodTrekker

continued on page 9

Culinary Tourism

Continued from page 4

developed by Erik Wolf, president of the International Culinary Tourism Association. Research commissioned by the Association in 2007 found that culinary travelers perform more pre-arrival research than any other traveler. The survey showed existing culinary travel information to be poor and/or inconsistent, and that many travelers do not trust "official" tourism websites.

"The number-one reason (80%) for trying a local restaurant is word-of-mouth from local colleagues or hotel staff.

Obviously, it is important to work with area hotels. However, for those doing 'word-of-mouth' research, we have created a new portal for the culinary travel industry," explained Wolf.

Serves Many Markets

FoodTrekker.com serves many markets: obviously culinary travelers themselves; destinations seeking to promote their culinary offerings; membership groups and associations (such as a B&B guild) looking to promote their members to culinary travelers; independent businesses (such as your local restaurants), and of course, the

media. To stay true to its mission to promote the unique and memorable culinary experiences culinary travelers want, FoodTrekker's content policy strongly favors local and independent businesses.

Create a Profile

Look at www.culinary-tourism.org/foodtrekker. The site promotes itself as a unique sales and marketing tool to reach culinary travelers. "Culinary travel information presented on a culinary travel website is more targeted and more relevant for your target market than a mere listing of restaurants or food events. Culinary-oriented listings are available at no charge, with enhanced listings available for a nominal fee. However, the real benefit comes from the sales leads generated from the site," Wolf explained.

Go to FoodTrekker.com, sign up and get your "foodie" profile. This is the best way to see how the site works and how it can help your local and independent culinary businesses. Next month, we will talk with Wolf and find out first-hand his recommendations for your local restaurants.

Also next month we will explore a couple of General Growth Properties, Inc., America's Premier Shopping Places marketplaces in NYC and Boston and see how they capitalize on this food phenomenon. Additionally, we will see how shopping centers have partnered to develop food promotions, how important farmer's markets are to a local area, Shop and Dine commissionable packages and more!

We are continuing this series of articles on tourism every other month and would like to focus on some of the more innovative tourism programs. Please submit your programs to me, either via e-mail at Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com, fax 732/545-3138 or mail. If possible, include samples of your graphics via e-mail. Full credit will be given to the person or team responsible for the program. Visit our new web site: www.cjfmarketinginternational.com. ■

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