DISCOVEREAT: TRAVEL, EAT SHARE
DISCOVERING THE WORLD, ONE BITE AT A TIME

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract
Food tourism has become a booming sector, with cuisine playing a key role in creating memorable travel experiences. According to the World Travel Association's 2022 report, 34% of tourists choose destinations based on their culinary appeal. The global culinary tourism market, worth USD 11.5 billion in 2023, is expected to grow rapidly, highlighting significant opportunities. This paper presents DiscoverEAT, a mobile app for travelers seeking unique cultural experiences through food. Combining a search engine with a social network, DiscoverEAT offers expertly curated 24-hour food tours by local experts, fostering a community of food enthusiasts. The study employs a comprehensive five-step internationalization roadmap, including PEST and Porter's Five Forces analysis, to assess the business environment and competitive landscape. Results indicate that DiscoverEAT can leverage rising disposable incomes, shifting cultural trends, and technological advancements, despite facing challenges from intense competition and new market entrants. The SWOT analysis highlights strengths such as the founders' expertise in food culture while addressing weaknesses like technical skill gaps and language barriers.
Strategic recommendations focus on using DiscoverEAT's strengths to capitalize on opportunities and mitigate threats. DiscoverEAT can differentiate itself in the expanding food tourism market by offering high-quality, tailored culinary guides. The study concludes that DiscoverEAT has the potential to thrive by promoting cultural exchange and preserving culinary traditions through engaging and authentic food experiences.

Keywords: Food tourism, gastronomy, PEST, Porter's Five Forces analysis, SWOT
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INTRODUCTION

Food Tourism has experienced significant growth in recent years, emerging as a vibrant and innovative sector within the tourism industry. As a result, the cuisine of a destination has become a major factor influencing the quality of a traveler's experience.

According to the World Travel Association (WTFA) 2022 Report, 34% of tourists visit places that attract them in terms of cuisine. Also, the report of Grandview research on Culinary Tourism Market Size & Trends estimated that The global culinary tourism market size was at USD 11.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 19.9% from 2024 to 2030. Therefore, the cuisine of the destination is an aspect of utmost importance in the quality of the holiday experience, where also lies the huge market potential to be explored

Among all the gastronomic activities like participating in cookery workshops, visiting vineyards and meeting local producers, and joining food events and fairs, the trending role of gastronomy is the conversion of the territory into a culinary landscape, which resulted in the growth of gastronomic offerings based on high-quality local products (UNMTO,2012). Tourists who participate in the new trends often contrast with 'everyday' or basic eating, as people search for 'authenticity' and distinction in local food and gastronomy. They are concerned about the origin of products and recognize the value of gastronomy as a means of socializing, a space for sharing life with others and exchanging experiences.

This business idea originates from multiple studies in local food products, cultivated within the MSc Food Identity program. The company leverages a multicultural background and strong

entrepreneurial skills to explore local foods combining both gastronomic and scientific perspectives.

DiscoverEAT is a mobile app for adventurous travelers searching for unique cultural experiences through food. It combines a search engine with a social network. Users can discover expert-designed, 24-hour food tours in any city, following itineraries curated by local experts for a unique culinary adventure. DiscoverEAT aims to build a community where users can share their culinary finds, creating a network of food enthusiasts. By connecting users with hidden gems and local traditions, DiscoverEAT goes beyond food recommendation, promoting cultural exchange and tradition preservation.

This analysis focuses on the relevant research literature about food tourism. The paper aims to identify the specific product-market fit that will serve as the starting point for launching this new business.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The main methodology applied for analyzing the project's feasibility and development is the use of an individual road map for business internationalization plans. This methodology supports business development through a five-step, 360-degree approach.

- Development Process Assessment: to analyze the environment of the business it is intended to create and to understand whether there's a market opportunity.
- Products Internationalization Process Assessment: to understand the different variabilities to take into account, including the company setting consumer needs, product offered, need satisfaction, time, and competitors)
- Resources Internationalization Process Assessment: to understand the amount of human resources, materials, equipment, and facilities required - if required.
- Communication Internationalization Process Assessment: to develop the business' visual identity
- Financial Internationalization Process Assessment: to evaluate costs, revenues, and profits.

Each of these analyses focuses on a crucial part when it comes to building up a business, aiming to assess the feasibility of the business idea in the market.

In addition, PEST and Porter's five forces analysis of business market entry were applied based on selected international literature and databases on food tourism. Therefore, various disciplinary approaches and focus of interests and SWOT analysis were identified to set up the market position of our products.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

PEST Analysis: Environmental Influences - business environment in the target market

The assessment of external factors and opportunities for the growth of gastronomic tourism was conducted using the PEST analysis. PEST analysis takes into account key aspects of the external environment: political, economic, social, and technological.

Political

Open Border

Tourism by definition entails crossing bor-ders in one form or another. Thanks to many governments' decisions to open up borders to foreigners, it's easier than ever to travel to new countries. As one of the main achievements of the European project, the Schengen area started in 1985 and covers over 4 million square kilometers with 29 countries. This allows more than 400 million people to travel freely between member countries without going through border controls. Also, a Schengen visa is an entry permit for non-EU nationals to make a short, temporary visit of up to 90 days in any 180 days to a country in the mentioned area.

Tax incentives

Another Political factor impacting the tourism industry across the world is represented by tax incentives. The taxes go towards improving the sector or the destination, such as through promotional activities, improvement, and implementation of public services that affect the destination: cleaning, waste management, etc.

Economic

Rising disposable incomes

Rising disposable incomes are a key driver of tourism growth. According to the World Tourism

Organization's 2019 research, tourism contributes a significant 10.3% to global GDP, with one in ten jobs worldwide linked to the sector. As economies flourish, individuals have more money to spend, leading to increased travel opportunities.

Social

Changing cultural trends:
The World Tourism Association defines culinary tourism as enjoying unique and unforgettable experiences of local food and drink. As local dishes are deeply connected with the culture and traditions of a certain area, gastronomy tourism has become a trend to create truly unique tours for demanding tourists as it is associated with respect for the culture and traditions of the local area, authenticity, sustainable development, and interesting experiences.

Contribution to rural areas
Preserving culture and heritage through traditional dishes is vital as it strongly influences the motivation of tourists. Culinary tourism advancement not only brings in extra income but also creates more job opportunities at the grassroots level, offering employment to local guides and chefs. Furthermore, rural communities can play a role in fostering growth in other sectors of the local economy, particularly agriculture.

Technological

Easy accessibilities
The biggest technological advancement has come from the popularity of mobile electronic devices. Travelers can book their trips on their mobile phones and get more information about their destination experience through social media. The sharing of Food Tour-themed content on social media has also created a buzz, with travelers being inspired to plan local food-themed trips.

Porter's five forces - For competitors' research
Porter's Five Forces model helps in identifying and analyzing the competitive forces that shape an industry. *(Gratton P. 2024)*. This model is applied to DiscoverEAT to understand its position in the culinary tourism market.

Competitive Rivalry

The global culinary tourism market is rapidly expanding, with a size of USD 11.5 billion in 2023 and an anticipated CAGR of 19.9% from 2024 to 2030. This growth attracts numerous competitors, making the market highly competitive. DiscoverEAT faces significant competition from:

Interrail.eu: While primarily a travel service, it offers a 24-hour guide format. However, DiscoverEAT's focus is specifically on food tours, providing a niche advantage.

Get Your Guide: A strong and well-known competitor providing various itineraries, including food trips.

Culture Trip: Offers well-structured 24-hour city trips

Social Media Content Creators: Influencers and bloggers create accessible, short, and effective food guides as well as famous social platforms.

Despite intense competition, DiscoverEAT differentiates itself by offering high-quality, tailored food guides, which helps moderate some competitive pressures.

Threat of New Entrants
The culinary tourism market has low entry barriers due to minimal capital requirements and the abundant availability of information. New entrants can easily enter the market, especially social media content creators who require little initial investment. However, DiscoverEAT intends to leverage its strong community of loyal customers to create a significant barrier to entry. Building strong customer loyalty and a robust network reduces the threat of new entrants.

Supplier Power
DiscoverEAT's suppliers consist of a network of food experts, including students from the MSc Food Identity program, teachers, and other professionals who provide 24-hour guides. With around 200 suppliers, DiscoverEAT can ensure a steady supply of high-quality content. Once the content is created, suppliers act mainly as consultants, reducing their bargaining power. The extensive network also enhances content reliability and feasibility, giving DiscoverEAT a competitive advantage.

Customer Power
Customers exercise significant power in the culinary tourism market due to the high availability of alternatives. They can drive prices

and demand better quality due to the vast amount of information and competing services. However, DiscoverEAT targets a specific niche, offering specialized advice to its target market, which can help retain customers despite high bargaining power.

Threat of Substitutes
The threat of substitutes is high as customers can easily switch to other platforms or services offering similar guides. Major substitutes include:
Tripadvisor: A well-established platform for restaurant reviews.
Lonely Planet: Renowned for its complete travel guides available in both print and digital formats.
Michelin Guide: A prestigious guide known for its restaurant recommendations worldwide.
Despite these substitutes, DiscoverEAT aims to provide unique, high-quality food guides tailored specifically to its target market, reducing the possibility of customers switching to substitutes.

RESULTS
In an expanding industry like the food industry, competition is usually less dramatic because the market grows so fast that competitors have little need to fight for customers.
However, even if the service given by the platform could be very similar to the ones already given by others, DiscoverEAt offers a unique service that distinguishes them from the high-quality tailored food guides, reducing competitive rivalry.

SWOT-   For   market   positioning
The SWOT Analysis is applied to assess and understand the internal and external forces that may create opportunities or threats for DiscoverEAT   *(Figure   1)*

Internal Strengths
DiscoverEAT is founded by MSc Food Identity students, providing a solid background in food and food culture. The creators' multicultural academic environment fosters a robust network of industry experts. Additionally, the team exhibits resilience and fast learning, crucial traits for growth and innovation in a competitive market.

Internal Weaknesses

However, the team lacks technical skills in software development and business startup processes, leading to significant challenges in the initial phases of the project. Moreover, a language barrier exists as many local individuals do not speak English, which could limit customer engagement and communication. The absence of investment capital surely represents a weakness for DiscoverEAT's development and expansion.

External Opportunities
The culinary tourism market presents significant opportunities for DiscoverEAT. Culinary journey bookings increased by 40% from 2022 to 2023, reflecting a growing interest in this niche. Market growth projections are also favorable, with the culinary tourism sector expected to expand from USD 1.1 billion in 2023 to over USD 1.79 billion by 2027. These trends indicate a burgeoning market with ample room for new entrants like DiscoverEAT.

External Threats
Contrary to this, DiscoverEAT faces substantial threats from established competitors and substitutes. Well-developed platforms such as Get Your Guide offer complete tourism services. These competitors have already captured significant market share and possess extensive resources to maintain their position.

Strategic Recommendations for DiscoverEAT

Using Strengths to Maximize Opportunities
By utilizing their multicultural experiences, the team can design immersive and authentic cultural experiences that set DiscoverEAT apart from competitors

Using Strengths to Minimize Threats
To mitigate the threats, DiscoverEAT should develop a focused marketing strategy targeting niche segments of the market, such as young travelers seeking unique culinary experiences. This targeted approach can help avoid direct competition with larger platforms. Additionally, delivering high-quality, well-researched guides and tours will build a loyal customer base, reducing the probability of switching to competitors.

Minimizing Weaknesses by Taking Advantage of Opportunities

Investing time in market research is crucial for DiscoverEAT to understand the latest trends in culinary tourism and develop content that aligns with these trends. It is also important to form strategic partnerships with local experts, chefs, and food bloggers to enhance the quality and attractiveness of the content. Furthermore, it may be helpful to schedule sessions with business counselors to help the team in the startup process and ensure continuous improvement.

Minimizing Weaknesses by Avoiding Threats
To overcome the internal weaknesses, DiscoverEAT should engage in fast learning programs to acquire essential skills in software development and business management, while working with experienced professionals. Additionally, exploring funding opportunities such as grants, scholarships, and startup incubators will be the primary strategy to secure the necessary capital for growth.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Expertise in Food and Culture	Lack of Technical Skills	Growing Food Tourism Market	Established and strong Competitors /Substitutes
Multicultural Experience	Language Barrier	Market Growth Projections	
Resilience and Fast Learning	No Investment Capital		

Figure 1 **SWOT Analysis**

CONCLUSIONS

Following the PEST analysis, a variety of beneficial factors have been identified as influencing the tourism sector. The opening of borders and tax incentives are key to establishing strong governmental support for tourism. Moreover, economic changes such as rising disposable incomes are making travel more attainable. Sociocultural factors like changing cultural trends and increased contributions to rural areas are also helping to preserve culture and heritage, while the popularity of mobile electronic devices is enhancing the accessibility of gastronomy tourism.

Through the Porter Five Forces analysis, the existing market situation was analyzed. In the face of Gastronomy Tourism, the main competitors in Competitive Rivalry are the online proxy platform （Online Travel Agency）

and social media content creators (Influencers). Participation in the market threshold is at a moderate level, while a certain amount of start-up capital support is needed to complete the cold start of the company. At Supplier Power, a strong expert support team building content barriers is recognized. Customer Power meets consumer-oriented principles in the travel industry. Combined with early market analysis, the positioning is the Niche segment, with a focus on providing a unique service that is distinct for the high-quality tailored food guides to reduce competitive risks.

SWOT analysis has helped to build product positioning and development strategies: expanding the market by providing unique expert support for cross-cultural eating experiences, doing market industry research to update product content sharing at any time, and building community connections and brand barriers.

Through the above three types of analysis, a clear understanding of the macro-environment and

micro-market analysis of DiscoverEAT was given, and in this regard, the product positioning and market strategy were established, giving a more holistic view of the product's internationalization assessments and the project's feasibility.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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