

How Memorable Are Agrifood Travel Experiences?

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Abstract: Destinations seek to increase their competitiveness by offering memorable experiences that can stimulate repeat visitation and positive word of mouth. Travel experiences centered on agrifood systems (i.e., agrifood tourism) encompass a set of attributes (e.g., authenticity and interaction with locals) that tend to be memorable. However, the extent to which these attributes contribute to memorability warrants further investigation. Thus, this study identified common and distinct elements of memorability across agritourism, culinary tourism, and craft-beverage tourism compared to beach tourism (control group). We surveyed a panel ($n = 1019$) in 2023 using a hypothetical travel scenario with four experience options. A multivariate analysis of variance showed high levels of memorability across various attributes of the agrifood experiences (e.g., learning opportunities and hands-on participation), with few differences across them, as compared to beach tourism. This study advances the scholarly construct of agrifood tourism by incorporating memorability within its complex dynamics. The study results also provide insights that marketers and managers of destinations with a mix of agrifood experiences can use to improve destination competitiveness and memorability (e.g., increasing educational offerings and adding more participative activities).

Keywords: agritourism; craft-beverage tourism; culinary tourism; memorability



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1. Introduction

As the number and variety of tourism offerings increase, destinations must strive to find mechanisms to distinguish themselves in a competitive marketplace [1]. One way to do so is by offering experiences with the capacity to create long-lasting memories, which is conceptualized as those that stimulate perceived personal significance (consequentiality), feelings and positive emotions (affect), the fulfillment of intentions or surprises (expectations), and recollection [2]. This memorability of an experience increases tourists' recall after travel [3–5]. Memorability of the travel experiences not only improves destination competitiveness but also tends to entice repeat visitation and positive word of mouth [6–8].

Attributes that have been long known to enhance the overall travel experience and contribute to memorability include hedonism, especially in providing escapism from daily routine [3,9]. However, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that eudaimonia, that is, pursuing meaning and purpose in travel experiences, can also contribute to memorability [3,10]. As such, destinations seeking to increase competitiveness are finding ways to incorporate experiential attributes into their offerings to enhance tourists' memorability [2]. These attributes circle around the notions of co-creation, defined as a high-quality interaction that enables the co-creation of unique experiences [11], and providing learning opportunities [12], particularly offered in authentic settings [13].

Experiential attributes, such as co-creation and hands-on activities, are hallmarks of niche tourism [14–16], in which travelers engage in activities to meet specific needs or interests related to a certain lifestyle or resource [17–19]. Agrifood tourism, encompassing the overlap of travel with key stages of the agricultural supply chain (production, aggregation, processing, and distribution), is a form of niche travel [20] built upon experiential

attributes [21]. Yet, work is needed to investigate the extent to which the experiential attributes of this form of specialized travel contribute to memorability.

Thus, this study was designed to identify common and distinct elements of memorability across three types of agrifood tourism experiences (agritourism, culinary tourism, and craft-beverage tourism) compared to beach tourism. The latter was defined in this study in its basic form, a combination of sun, sand, and sea-related experiences for travelers seeking hedonic pleasure rather than eudemonic meaning and purpose [22]. Specifically, this study seeks to answer three interconnected questions: (1) How much memorability do different travel experiences create? (2) Do the levels of memorability differ between agrifood and beach travel experiences? (3) Do experiences across three types of agrifood tourism (agritourism, culinary tourism, craft-beverage tourism) differ in their level of memorability? Answering these questions will contribute to the overall understanding of memorability in the context of agrifood tourism and will provide information to tourism destination managers and marketers and agrifood actors (e.g., producers and retailers) to program and position their tourism products to strengthen destination competitiveness.

Agrifood Tourism

Agrifood tourism, conceptualized as travelling to experience any aspect of the entire agrifood supply chain [20], has emerged in tandem with the growing trend among travelers to experience intangible heritage notably centered on food and agricultural lifestyles [23]. Subsumed within this market trend, three types of niche travel are notable for their rapid growth globally: agritourism [24], culinary tourism [25], and craft-beverage tourism [26]. Agritourism, defined as traveling to a working farm to experience any on-farm recreational or educational activities [27], encompasses a wide range of experiences, such as recreational self-harvests, observations of agricultural processes, and educational or leisure farm tours. Agritourism is an educational and enriching experience for individuals and families, as it presents an opportunity to learn about agriculture, to better understand where the food comes from, and to relish the beauty of farmscapes.

Culinary tourism, defined broadly as the pursuit of memorable eating experiences with unique and authentic foods that link local food systems with the tourist experience [28], can range from enjoying street foods to sophisticated dining experiences. Furthermore, culinary tourism experiences improve travelers' understanding of a destination's history, culture, and way of life through the lens of its food. This experience delivers a memorable way to sustain small-scale food producers, connect with local communities, and savor the diverse flavors of the world. Craft-beverage tourism, travelling to taste, prepare, or learn about craft beverages, such as artisanal brews, spirits, and wines [29,30], highlights production facility (e.g., breweries, distilleries, wineries) tours and pairing classes, among others. It provides tourists who are passionate about craft beverages the opportunity to connect with the producers, thus making each craft-beverage experience distinct.

These multiple manifestations of agrifood tourism feature unique and authentic experiences that connect visitors with residents, revealing insiders' perspectives of local ways of living [30–32]. These experience attributes align with the elements known to promote memorability, such as co-creation and learning opportunities in authentic settings [11–13,33,34]. They are also suitable for producing a mix of economic (e.g., job generation and the revitalization of local businesses), socio-cultural (e.g., heritage preservation and community bonding), and environmental (e.g., reduced transportation costs and conservation of natural resources) benefits for the destinations [30,35,36]. As such, the development and strengthening of different forms of agrifood tourism can promote a destination's competitiveness.

Agrifood tourists are known to seek memorable experiences in an active, differentiated, and unique manner by establishing a deep connection with agricultural activities in an authentic environment [36–38]. Because of the potential to connect diversified agricultural production practices and tourism opportunities, policymakers, local food producers and distributors, destination marketers, and researchers are interested in developing and lever-

aging agrifood tourism to strengthen and sustain local food networks [21,36]. This potential means that agrifood tourism can not only maximize the positive impacts that tourism brings to destination communities—through jobs, direct spending, and tax generation—but it can also generate benefits for residents, farmers, and other food system stakeholders.

Considering the benefits that agrifood tourism can deliver to destinations and the potential for memorability to encourage repeat visitation and positive word of mouth, it is essential to investigate the extent to which the attributes of agrifood experiences (e.g., learning and co-creation) facilitate memorability. Due to the identification of this need and the unified call from scholars and practitioners to maximize the potential of agrifood tourism, we conducted this exploratory study.

2. Materials and Methods

This study assessed the levels of memorability of different experience attributes in the context of agrifood tourism. In 2023, we collected data from a non-random sample of 1019 adults residing in the United States of America (USA) using an online survey platform. The panel was recruited to be at least 18 years old, residing across all four regions of the USA, and distributed across gender and age.

Informed by the literature, the survey instrument included 10 experience attributes that tend to foster memorability, which altogether captured learning opportunities (e.g., “learning something new”) [3,12], experiential and creative attributes (e.g., “hands-on participation”) [11,12,34,39], authenticity and uniqueness (e.g., “being in an authentic setting”) [13], and overall hedonic experiences (e.g., “escaping from daily life”) [3,9]. A series of 21-point scales anchored at zero (very little) and 20 (very much) were used to measure the experience attributes to increase data validity and allow for a better response distribution [40]. The survey also queried participants’ demographic information through a mix of categorical and scale formats.

The survey participants first accessed a travel scenario page describing an all-expense-paid trip of two days, including accommodation in a 5-star hotel and a 4 h excursion (travel experience). The participants were asked to imagine that they had no travel barriers (e.g., no family obligations) and to choose their preferred travel experience, either to visit local farms (agritourism, $n = 255$), eateries (culinary tourism, $n = 255$), craft-beverage facilities (craft-beverage tourism, $n = 254$), or a popular beach ($n = 255$). Defined in its basic form (hedonic enjoyment of sun, sand, and sea), the beach tourism experience served as the control group to allow for comparisons with the agrifood experiences capturing eudemonic (e.g., co-creation, learning opportunities) experiences. The participants were also given the “I prefer to stay at home” option, in which case they exited the survey. Then, the participants were asked how much the 10 experience attributes (e.g., hands-on participation, co-creation of the experience) would make their trip memorable in the context of their preferred (chosen) travel activity (agritourism, culinary tourism, craft-beverage tourism, beach tourism).

The data analysis included descriptive statistics, Cronbach’ reliability tests (≥ 0.70 threshold), and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA; $p < 0.05$). MANOVA was performed to test the differences between the memorability levels of experience attributes across travel scenarios (independent samples), where each group had a common mean (no sub-groups), using Pillai’s Trace to assess the multivariate effects. Although alternative tests are not required when assumptions of normality and collinearity are violated with large sample sizes [41], like in this study, a Kruskal–Wallis test was also conducted to compare the independent samples given the non-parametric distribution across the memorability items.

The survey participants were distributed across the four regions of the USA (24.5% Northeast, 24.0% Midwest, 27.4% South, 24.1% West) and lived along the urban–rural continuum (18.1% in rural areas, 18.0% in small cities, 38.7% on suburbs, 25.2% in large cities). The respondents were proportionally distributed across gender (50.8% male, 47.9% female, 1.3% non-binary) and age (32.6% were 35 years old or younger, 31.5% were 56 years old or older). Most respondents were White (79.4%), followed by Black (11.4%); small

proportions of participants identified as Latin, Hispanic, or Chicano/a (11.4%) or Asian (5.2%). Most had completed formal education programs, having either a technical (10.9%) or four-year college (21.8%) degree; 26.5% had a graduate degree. The participants' household annual income was proportionally distributed among those earning less than USD 50,000 (36.8%) and over USD 100,000 (32.5%).

3. Results

Across all travel experiences (agritourism, culinary tourism, craft beverage tourism, and a beach visit), the attributes with higher perceived memorability ratings were the overall positive nature of the experience ($M = 15.36$) and escaping from daily life ($M = 15.20$; Table 1), which are frequently expected outcomes of traveling [11]. Conversely, the opportunity to be creative ($M = 13.25$), participation in hands-on activities ($M = 13.37$), and experiencing strong emotions ($M = 13.39$) were perceived to be the least memorable experience attributes. This may be because, most often, popular tourism experiences provide little opportunity to engage in these attributes [15]. Collectively, these findings challenge the existing knowledge that memorable experiences require greater engagement, such as creativity, hands-on activities, or strong emotions [33,34]. Rather, these findings support the potential for positivity and hedonic experiences, notably by escapism from daily life [3,9], to contribute to memorability.

Table 1. Levels of memorability across different experience attributes.

Experience Attributes ($n = 1019$; $\alpha = 0.928$)	Levels of Memorability			Mean ^a	Standard Deviation
	Low (0–10.99)	Medium (11–16.99)	High (17–20)		
Overall positive experience	17.0%	38.7%	44.3%	15.36	4.35
Escaping from daily life	19.5%	36.6%	43.9%	15.20	4.47
Being in an authentic setting	23.2%	38.4%	38.4%	14.67	4.58
Learning something new	25.9%	39.7%	34.4%	14.09	4.88
Learning about the area's culture	27.0%	41.0%	32.0%	13.86	4.83
Co-creating the experience	28.6%	39.1%	32.3%	13.74	4.99
Providers sharing their skills	28.9%	38.4%	32.7%	13.68	5.16
Experiencing strong emotions	32.7%	37.8%	29.5%	13.39	5.08
Hands-on participation	32.6%	35.4%	32.0%	13.37	5.39
Opportunity to be creative	34.1%	35.6%	30.3%	13.25	5.30

^a Measured on a 21-point scale, ranging from "0 = Very little" to "20 = Very much".

A statistically significant model ($F = 0.278$; $p < 0.001$) indicated that the levels of memorability vary across different types of travel experiences (Table 2), as previously reported [42]. Pairwise comparisons revealed different levels of memorability on all but one (overall positive experience) attribute across experiences. Specifically, those who preferred going to the beach ranked "escaping from daily life" significantly higher than those choosing agrifood travel experiences (agritourism, culinary tourism, and craft-beverage tourism), confirming the strong role of hedonic escapism in creating memorable experiences overall [3,43,44]. Conversely, compared to those who preferred going to the beach, the respondents who selected any agrifood travel experience reported higher memorability levels in experiential attributes, namely, those related to educational opportunities (of the destination and something new), sharing skills, hands-on participation, and creative opportunities. These results support the influence of experiential attributes in creating memorable travel experiences [3,11–13,33,34].

Table 2. A comparison of memorability levels of experience attributes across travel scenarios.

Experience Attributes (<i>n</i> = 1019; α = 0.928)	Average Memorability ¹				F-Value ²	p-Value ³
	Agri-Tourism	Culinary Tourism	Craft-Beverage Tourism	Beach Tourism (Control)		
Overall positive experience	15.46	15.72	15.15	15.10	1.08	0.359 (0.169)
Escaping from daily life	14.77 ^a	14.96 ^a	14.94 ^a	16.12 ^b	4.97	0.002 (0.010)
Being in an authentic setting	15.29 ^a	14.39	14.91	14.07 ^b	3.57	0.010 (0.008)
Learning something new	14.98 ^a	14.45 ^a	14.81 ^a	12.15 ^b	19.55	<0.001
Learning about the area's culture	14.73 ^a	14.22 ^a	14.38 ^a	12.13 ^b	15.83	<0.001
Co-creating the experience	14.38 ^a	13.31	14.09	13.20 ^b	3.43	0.017 (0.010)
Providers sharing their skills	14.95 ^a	14.32 ^a	14.88 ^a	10.59 ^b	46.95	<0.001
Experiencing strong emotions	14.31 ^a	13.01 ^b	12.83 ^b	13.43	4.36	0.005 (0.002)
Hands-on participation	14.61 ^a	13.43 ^a	13.84 ^a	11.62 ^b	14.67	<0.001
Opportunity to be creative	14.26 ^a	13.53 ^a	13.46 ^a	11.72 ^b	10.81	<0.001

¹ Measured on 21-point scales ("0 = Very little" to "20 = Very much"). ² MANOVA with Pillai's Trace ($F = 0.278$; $p < 0.001$). ³ Parenthesis from Kruskal–Wallis tests ($H = 27.422$; $p < 0.001$). ^{a,b} Different superscripts indicate significant pairwise differences.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that destinations featuring a variety of agrifood experiences should promote attributes with high levels of memorability (e.g., learning opportunities) to distinguish themselves from travel experiences mostly focused on hedonic experiences and attracting those seeking unique experiences. Also, the high memorability levels of experiential attributes across agritourism, culinary tourism, and craft-beverage tourism suggest that destinations encapsulating a mix of these experiences should consider promoting them together to strengthen their appeal. Destination marketers should emphasize highly memorable experience attributes (e.g., hands-on experiences) across different agrifood activities (e.g., u-pick apples, cooking with herbs, and mixing your own cocktail) rather than focusing on the type of niche experience itself.

The statistically highest memorability aspects of being in an authentic setting ($M = 15.29$) and co-creating the experience ($M = 14.38$) of those who chose agritourism as compared to those preferring going to the beach ($M = 14.07$, $M = 13.20$, respectively) speak for the specific interests that agritourists seek [31,38]. Such specialized interest was also manifested by the statistically highest memorability of strong experiences that agritourism generates ($M = 14.31$) as compared to culinary ($M = 13.01$) and craft-beverage ($M = 12.83$) tourism. Such findings offer agritourism providers the following several managerial recommendations: (1) develop programming activities that feature their unique agricultural authenticity (e.g., observation of their value-added processes), (2) cultivate opportunities for visitors to experience strong emotions (e.g., interactions with animals), and (3) invite visitors to engage in co-creation through activities that allow them to engage with farmers or staff (e.g., harvest and craft making). Implementing such practices will allow agritourism operators to attract agritourists and enhance their competitive advantage when differentiating themselves from culinary and craft-beverage experiences.

4. Conclusions

This study identified the common and distinct elements of memorability across three types of agrifood tourism (agritourism, culinary, and craft-beverage tourism) compared to the basic form of beach (hedonic enjoyment of sun, sand, and sea) tourism. Altogether, the study findings indicate that several attributes, notably those related to experiential activities (e.g., learning opportunities and hands-on activities), are perceived to be more memorable in the agrifood tourism context than in the beach tourism context. The results also indicate that a few experience attributes are more memorable in the agritourism context than in the culinary and craft-beverage tourism contexts (i.e., experiencing strong experiences) and in the beach tourism context (e.g., authentic setting).

The study results carry several theoretical and practical implications that can help move the agrifood tourism construct forward. A noteworthy scholarly contribution of this study pertains to the budding body of literature on memorability associated with agrifood experiences. Specifically, this study advances the understanding of the complex dynamics of agrifood tourism [20,21] by identifying common and distinct elements of memorability across different agriculture, culinary, and beverage experiences. Such knowledge effectively integrates these valuable forms of niche tourism with the existing body of knowledge around memorability [16] and offers a foundation from which to explore how tourists experience memorability in different types of tourism experiences.

From the managerial side, destination marketers and managers can apply these findings to help leverage agrifood tourism as a mechanism to improve both their destination competitiveness and memorability. Similarly, destination managers can design, develop, and promote tourism programs to reflect memorable experience attributes (e.g., co-creating the experience and hands-on participation). A valuable first step would be to inventory the existing agrifood experiences, particularly agritourism operations, at their destination and identify the elements of those experiences that this study indicates will enhance memorability (e.g., authenticity, emotions, and co-creation). Promoting these existing operations can help attract visitors who may then engage in an experience that will increase the memorability of their visit to both the individual operation and the entire destination. This inventory (e.g., the making of pumpkin pie, cheese, and farm fresh apple cider donuts), with an emphasis on memorability attributes, may also help destination marketers and managers identify where new agrifood operations or offerings may be developed to help maximize visitors' memorable experiences.

By integrating the memorability aspects of agrifood tourism into destination development and promotion efforts, destination leaders may reap the benefits of memorability, including repeat visitation and positive word of mouth [6–8]. The scholarly and practical implications of this study are timely and needed considering the array of socio-cultural, environmental, and economic benefits that agritourism [35], craft-beverage tourism [30], and culinary tourism [36] yield to providers and their surrounding communities, as well as their suitability to innovate destinations [20].

When interpreting these results, it is important to acknowledge a couple of limitations that may require further validation. First, although much effort was placed in creating the travel scenarios, their hypothetical nature calls for replicating this study among actual agrifood tourists. Secondly, the non-random nature of the study panel may affect the generalizability of the study results to some extent. For example, the participants reported high levels of formal education, which may have augmented preferences for agrifood experiences.

The aforementioned limitations, along with the study results, give some directions for future research. Given the use of a hypothetical scenario among a panel, it is advisable that the study is replicated among actual agrifood tourists, preferably after an onsite visit, to validate the level of memorability of different attributes across different agrifood experiences. While this study's results advance the understanding of agrifood tourism, it also calls for its further investigation to refine its scholarly standing and fortify its managerial, programming, and marketing insights. This study investigated the memorability of a few experience attributes (e.g., learning something new and being in an authentic setting). Thus, future studies should consider expanding the memorability items to capture their complexity. It is also advisable that future research considers regional or local delimitations that can account for specific socio-cultural dynamics (e.g., local food movements and a strong cuisine heritage), market changes (e.g., immigration patterns), and regulatory factors that may influence the interests of tourists seeking agrifood experiences.

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