

## COMFORT FOOD IN CULINARY TOURISM: NEGOTIATING “HOME” AS EXOTIC AND FAMILIAR

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In *Comfort Food Meanings and Meals*,  
edited by Michael Owen Jones and Lucy M. Long.  
Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2017.

Comfort food usually brings to mind familiar foods that represent security, home, and cherished grandmothers. The phrase emerged in the U.S. in the late 1970s and 80s, and has been embraced by mainstream American food culture where it generally refers to foods associated with a generic and stereotypical but mythic national past grounded in home and family and represented by hearty dishes heavy on the carbohydrates, sugar, and salt, or by cooking and eating styles that emphasize quantity, relaxation, and lack of any physical or psychological or emotional stress. The category appears in restaurants, cooking shows, recipe books, magazines, and advertising, and is becoming a global phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the type of food; however, one expects to find in culinary tourism, “eating out of curiosity” or traveling primarily for a food experience, a popular emerging niche within the tourism industry. Culinary tourism, also known as food tourism and gastrotourism, usually emphasizes novelty, exoticism, and even a slight bit of danger in trying new experiences. Industry producers tend to promote upscale, gourmet, and “memorable” foods and dining experiences--qualities that seem the opposite of comfort food. The two trends appear to be contradictory, yet there are now instances of comfort food being incorporated into culinary tourism, not just as a descriptor of foods being offered in restaurants as part of hospitality services to tourists, but as the main attraction and destination of culinary tours. Furthermore, they are appearing not only in regions usually associated with comfort food, such as the Midwest and the South, but throughout the country and in urban areas as well--and not only in the US but around the globe.

For example, in 2009, a newspaper in New Mexico, the *Albuquerque Journal*, carried the headline, “New Tourism department Initiative Seeks to Create Culinary Trail for Famous Comfort Food.” Several years later, a website for tourism in Indiana announced a culinary tour offering “Southern comfort, German heritage and locally grown produce” in the southwestern part of the state. Similarly, the description for “Authentic Ohio Amish Country Tours” boasted that: “On one tour, guests can share a private meal with an Amish bishop and his family, learning about their life story and traditions while you relish Amish comfort food.” Yet another tour advertisement promises to provide the “sweet warmth of hearty meals to fill your heart with gastronomic joy,” and concludes by asking: “But where will you find the best comfort food in London?”

How do these tours bridge the contradictions between these two categories? How do these tours define comfort food, what audiences are they trying to attract, and how successful are they? Do they change the food itself in any manner, or impact our perceptions of either comfort food or culinary tourism? Does this convergence have broader significance? What does it mean for “familiar” foods generally associated with home and family to be presented as an attraction for tourists? Whose home and whose families are being presented? Is home a “real” and physical space, or is it metaphoric, evoked by images? And what of those who do not find memories of home nurturing and affirming? Are other associations offered through these tours that allow for the temporary relief from stress expected from “comfort foods”?

I address these questions by focusing on examples in the American Midwest. I draw upon personal experiences and ethnographic research as well as advertising and

publicity by providers within the tourism and hospitality industries. I also examine the concepts of comfort food and culinary tourism, defining the terms and identifying points where they might converge.

### **Definitions--Comfort Food**

The first use of the phrase “comfort food” seems to be from Dr. Joyce Brothers in a 1966 newspaper column titled “Psychological Problems Play a Part in Obesity,” in which she writes: “Studies indicate that most adults, when under severe emotional stress, turn to what could be called “comfort food” — food associated with the security of childhood, like mother's poached egg or famous chicken soup.”<sup>2</sup> A better known and apparently more influential appearance, however, was in an article in the magazine section of the *Washington Post* on December 25, 1977, in which restaurant critic Phyllis Richman called upon it in describing shrimp and grits—not a dish that would immediately come to mind for many Americans as a comfort food. In 2013, Richman revisited the term, illustrating it with an anecdote of an occasion in which she was sick and wanted chicken noodle soup. She observed that the concept existed; it simply needed a name, and even though the specific foods illustrating that concept differ for each of us, we all seem to understand it.<sup>3</sup>

Richman’s claim seems accurate since the term has since been widely adopted into American foodways vocabulary, used in the commercial food scene of restaurants, cookbooks, and domestic and cooking magazines as well as in everyday speech. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, comfort food is now defined as “food that comforts or affords solace.”<sup>4</sup> These foods usually—but not always—tend to be high in fat, sugar, and carbohydrates, are oftentimes convenient or easy to prepare (not stressful), provide physical warmth and emotional nurturing, and carry positive memories of the past and feelings of familiarity and security.

Sociologist Julie Locher offers a definition based on her research with college students: “Comfort food may be best thought of as any food consumed by individuals, often during periods of stress, that evokes positive emotions and is associated with significant social relationships.”<sup>5</sup> Locher points out that the phrase came into vernacular speech in the 1990s, becoming particularly popular after the events of Sept. 11, 2001, a time of social upheaval on a global scale, perhaps relevant to understanding its usage in culinary tourism.<sup>6</sup> In further study of the concept, Locher and several colleagues identify a number of characteristics of comfort food gleaned from surveys of undergraduates.<sup>7</sup> These foods displayed several patterns: they evoked a sense of familiarity, were eaten when “feeling down” or needing “an extra boost,” and were often consumed when alone. From this research, the authors also identify four categories of comfort foods according to the primary characteristic of bringing relief from stress: nostalgic, indulgence, convenience, and physical comfort foods. The specific foods representing these categories differed according to each individual, but there has since developed a popular consensus of what comfort foods are, and these tend to be “all-American”<sup>8</sup> ones associated with home-cooking, such as meatloaf and mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, fried chicken, pies, cakes, and so on.

The research by Locher and colleagues has ramifications for understanding how comfort food is used in culinary tourism. They note that familiar foods are turned to for stress relief and comfort because new and unfamiliar ones tend to cause anxiety (2005: 21).<sup>9</sup> “Familiar” tends to be understood in terms of home, family, and childhood, and those concepts are frequently invoked in reference to comfort food: “homemade,” “home-cooked,” “family-style,” or “just like grandmother made” are typical descriptions. For many of us, this nostalgia romanticizes the past, but its role in allowing us to participate in those idealizations perhaps helps to explain why comfort food has been

embraced by the general public. While later studies have questioned the efficacy of comfort food's power to comfort, one study claims that it fulfills a need to belong and to alleviate loneliness.<sup>10</sup> Home ideally represents a place where a feeling of belongingness is nurtured.

Furthermore, because of its primary function being the relief of stress, comfort food has become a recognized genre that is evaluated differently from "regular" food. Rather than being judged for its nutritional, health, or other qualities, it is judged for its psychological and emotional benefits.<sup>11</sup> Reframing a food as belonging to that genre means that it will then be judged accordingly—and the consumption of it can be justified on the basis of needing those benefits. Presenting a food as comfort food, then, means that the usual concerns for health, nutrition, convenience, expense, environmental sustainability or other factors motivating our food choices can be suspended while we focus on the emotional and nurturing aspects of the food.<sup>12</sup> For example, a bowl of ice cream after a relationship dissolves, a carbohydrate-loaded meal when back home from college or visiting family, or high fat and sugar fried dough for various holiday celebrations could all be deemed physically unhealthy, but can be justified because of a need for comfort.

That comfort food has come to be equated with unhealthful eating is evident in newer trends in comfort food that attempt to bring it in-line with current concerns over nutrition, health, the industrial food system, and environmental sustainability. The internet, cookbooks, magazines, and cooking shows frequently push recipes for stereotypical comfort food dishes (macaroni and cheese, meatloaf, fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, desserts, etc.) that use ingredients considered healthier, more nutritious, and prepared in ways that use less fat or that help retain or boost the nutrients.<sup>13</sup> Locally and organically grown, seasonal, and native ingredients are also being promoted, particularly in replacing the frequently heavily processed ingredients in many comfort foods such as cream of mushroom soup in green bean casserole.<sup>14</sup> Comfort food has also been appropriated by the "foodie" movement that approaches cooking and eating as recreation, entertainment and artistic expression, so that up-dated versions of classic comfort foods—"comfort food done with a twist"—are now popular. Furthermore, both the cultural diversity and the individualism of American society now shows up in the recognition that the specific foods providing comfort differ person to person and group to group.<sup>15</sup>

### **Definitions—Culinary Tourism**

Food has always been a part of hospitality services offered to travelers, but it was generally not treated by American or British society as an attraction in itself.<sup>16</sup> A niche within tourism that focused on food only started to develop in the 1990s, with tourism scholars and industry partners in England, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada leading the way, and the US joining these efforts in the mid-2000s. Termed gastrotourism, food tourism, and culinary tourism, it grew initially out of wine tourism and has generally emphasized higher-end, gourmet, distinctive, and exotic foods. By the latter part of the first decade of 2000, the global tourism industry had discovered culinary tourism. It now thrives as one of the most popular types of international and domestic tourism and is perceived as a significant contributor to economic development.<sup>17</sup> As an industry, culinary tourism focuses on the commercial viability of particular dishes, cuisines, and venues, evaluating them on their potential for drawing tourists away from home and spending money on products and experiences. The emphasis is on offering foods that will motivate travel and consumption, which usually translates into higher-end, gourmet foods that are exotic in some way and not available at home.

Comfort food, because of its associations with home and the familiar, would not seem to be a suitable category of food to offer: it might be appropriate for those tourists not particularly interested in food, however culinary tourists are generally seeking foods that are distinctive and unfamiliar or prepared in a manner that is new to them.<sup>18</sup> Yet comfort food is being incorporated into these tours. Approaching culinary tourism as a cultural activity helps shed light on how and why comfort food might fit in. Tourism, in general, can be seen as a negotiation of novelty and familiarity, or, as the motto for tourism in Hawaii stated: “exotic but safe.”<sup>19</sup> A destination has to be exotic enough to stir curiosity, to draw people away from home, but it needs to offer enough safety so that people are not afraid to visit. Culinary tourism similarly is a negotiation between the exotic and the familiar. The food needs to be novel, strange, or different enough to stir curiosity, but familiar enough to be recognizable as an edible substance. Such “eating out of curiosity,” as I first defined culinary tourism, is a constant balancing between what is new to an individual or group and what is familiar, as well as between palatability and individual experiences.<sup>20</sup>

A more extensive definition of culinary tourism as “...the voluntary intentional participation in the foodways of an Other ...” opened up more possibilities for types of foodways experiences as well as types of Others or novel foods.<sup>21</sup> Within this formulation, foodways includes the total range of activities and processes around food, expanding tourism to more than the consumption of food to its production, procurement, preservation, preparation, presentation, and even cleanup and disposal. Also, foods considered exotic can represent different times, regions, places, belief systems, classes, occupations, ages, and personal tastes, not just the more common cultural or ethnic Other. This expands the range of foods and food experiences that can be included as attractions for culinary tourism, and the industry is slowly recognizing that. Regional foods, for example, have become a highly marketable destination, and heritage tourism now celebrates dishes and menus recreated from the past. Other aspects of foodways are also being explored, particularly, preparation, with cooking classes being popular destinations and “add-on’s” to tours and sometimes even include shopping for ingredients in another country. Agritourism—tourism focused on agriculture—is also recognizing that eating food might be connected to raising it, so that orchards, dairies, farms, vineyards, and such now frequently include tastings or dinners along with tours of their vicinities.

Comfort food within the culinary tourism industry may reflect marketing strategies that constantly search for something new to offer customers. It also demonstrates the expanding notions of food as foodways and of what foods are edible and palatable. Within this more cultural-based understanding of culinary tourism, though, it may also represent a turning inward to recognize and celebrate what has been overlooked “at home,” so to speak, or it may represent a shift of what is familiar to be something only accessible as a tourist. To better understand the meanings of these trends we need to look at what types of tours are featuring comfort food, what audiences they seem to appeal to, what types of foods are included, and what associations are attached to them.

### **Examples of Comfort Food in Culinary Tourism**

I explore here three tourism projects. Each represents different approaches being used within culinary tourism, and highlights different themes of comfort as well as types of Other. The first features the Amish, an ethnic group historically considered outside the American mainstream culture—exotic—who have been the object of a thriving tourism industry. Their foodways reflect their history and includes some unique dishes, but actually shares many commonalities with standard “American” fare, making the cuisine a relatively familiar one for culinary tourists that can represent nostalgia as well as an

ethnic Other. The second example is a much more recently developed tour in a part of Ohio popular for outdoor recreation whose natural environment and seasonal changes to that environment are prime tourist attractions. The food offered is familiar “classic comfort foods,” and these are presented as offering physical comfort that is necessary and well deserved after braving the cold weather and natural hardships of winter. The third tour features restaurants in a section of Indiana offering a range of foods representing different types of comfort and different types of Other. This last has undergone several name changes, suggesting that the place of comfort food is still being worked out within the tourism industry. All three are in the same region, the Midwest, so share broader expectations surrounding their food and culture.

### **The Cultural Context—The Midwest**

The Midwest generally designates the eastern interior of the country, including the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The Great Plains states (Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Dakota) are sometimes included.<sup>22</sup> Although vast differences occur in topography, settlement history, and ethnic make-up, the area shares features that have shaped a common culinary culture—pioneer heritage, agriculture as the historical basis of economies and society, strong ties to industrial agriculture, social and political conservatism, significant cultural divisions between urban and rural, and an emphasis on family as the central unit. The region generally also displays an interesting contradiction of embracing of mass-produced, corporate foods—many of which are produced there, so technically are “local”—while also emphasizing family foodways traditions and home cooking.

Midwestern food is the epitome of comfort food—lots of carbohydrates and starches, fats, and sugar, a “meat and potatoes” menu, and large quantities. It is a “no surprises,” straightforward, plain style of cooking in terms of ingredients and methods, but it is felt to be prepared attentively and cooked “with love.” A recipe site describes it in the following way: “Prepare for hearty fare: we’re heading to the Heartland! When we say ‘American food,’ we mean the soothing comfort foods of the Midwest: fare that’s hearty and simple, not fancy or frivolous.”<sup>23</sup>

That attitude makes it difficult to sell Midwestern food to culinary tourists, who tend to look for more gourmet, up-scale dishes that are unique and require culinary skills. It is not a food culture that emphasizes curiosity and the exotic. Instead, it is pragmatic in that people want to know exactly what they are getting for their money and know that they will like it. Food is also used more to bring people together than to demonstrate individuality and innovation, so that standard Midwestern comfort food does not offer the kind of cultural capital that tourists oftentimes seek. In general, this means that the food needs to be “fancied up” in order to attract those consumers interested in fine dining or gourmet cooking. That is what usually happens in marketing and advertising for restaurants. A restaurant in Indianapolis, Indiana, for example advertises “Midwestern comfort food with a culinary twist.”<sup>24</sup> Its menu is a mixture of old and new, local and international, offering items such as “Grilled cheese nostalgia,” “brat burger,” fried chicken, hand cut noodles.

These attitudes towards the food of the Midwest carry over to tourism in the area in general, which is sometimes referred to as “the fly-over region” of the US because of its apparent lack of holding anything of interest to tourists. Aside from a few major cities, particularly Chicago, it is not usually a destination for international tourists, but it emphasizes domestic tourism within the region with a focus on outdoor recreation, family activities, “staycations,” and smaller city attractions. It is within this context that the comfort food culinary tours are being developed.

### Example 1: Amish Comfort Food and Culinary Tourism

The Amish have long been a tourist attraction, a fact that they have manipulated for profit and, to some extent, cultural sustainability. They originated in Switzerland in 1525 with roots in the Protestant Reformation. A group split in 1693 into Mennonite, which explains some of the overlaps and confusions between the two groups in the US. Religious persecution forced the Amish to leave their homeland and they no longer exist in Europe. They came to North America in two waves, first in the mid 1700s and again in the early 1800s, establishing farming communities, particularly in central Ohio and eastern and northern Indiana, the two states that today have the largest populations of Amish out of the total of around 261,000 individuals. Amish communities can now be found in 28 states and the province of Ontario in Canada, with significant populations in Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin.

In the US, the Amish adapted the ingredients available in colonial and pioneer America, particularly, corn, molasses, apples, cabbage, and meat and other products from pigs, cows, and chickens. Amish cuisine today features potatoes, noodles, hearty soups, sausages, root vegetables, sauerkraut and other pickled vegetables (beets, green beans, cucumbers), bread and cheese. Cream-based gravies moisten the food, and sweet and sour (sugar and vinegar) flavors appear frequently in pickles and salads. Pies, both savory and sweet, are popular. Chicken "pot pies" are common, as are a molasses pie, called "shoofly pie," and a dried apple one known as *snitz* pie. Pickles and relishes are standard accompaniments to meals, and "chow-chow" has become an iconic Amish dish, as have apple butter, sweet and sour cabbage, and such meat products as bologna and scrapple (a "pudding" made from ground beef and pork heart), liver, and kidneys mixed with cornmeal. The Amish diet includes plentiful sweets--cakes, sweet rolls, and specialties, such as the regional Pennsylvania "whoopie pie," two rounds of small chocolate cake around a cr me filling.

This is quintessential comfort food. It is fattening, and full of things that are not considered healthful or nutritious by Americans. Marketing of these foods and tourism projects, though, make no apologies for that. The food offers a way to experience a lifestyle from the past that is seen as a needed antidote to the stress of modern living. Although the Amish are exotic, they are a relatively "safe" Other, and so is their food. It embodies the values of the past, a past that comforts on the basis of nostalgia for "simpler" times.

A website for Ohio "Amish country," explains their food this way:

*Amish Country Dining*

***You might call it comfort food. We just call it "dinner."***

*Amish Country attracts people for many reasons - scenery, crafts, quilts and furniture, to name a few. But at the heart of it all is the food. The outside world calls it "comfort food."*

*We just call it dinner. Amish cooks have been blending simple ingredients into delicious treats for generations, and now you can enjoy them too, whether it's sharing a family-style meal reminiscent of grandma's house, or sinking your teeth into a cream-filled "whoopie pie."<sup>25</sup>*

The site then goes on to list venues, including restaurants (Dutchman Restaurants, Inns, and Bakeries run by the Dutchman Hospitality Group), wine cellars, gourmet market, cheese makers/shop, flea market, Schmucker's store and caf ; Amish Door village (a restaurant, Victorian Inn, bakery, and shops). It makes no attempt to try to appease guilt for consuming these rich foods although they are stereotypically hearty and heavy fare. Instead, they offer them as a window into another way of life, so that being a tourist with them helps one escape to the past. Another tour site emphasizes the educational aspect of culinary tourism:

*A tour of Amish Country is a fantastic way to learn about the rich history of the determined, hardworking, and tight-knit community.*

*Amish Heartland Tours offers several tour options that lend a closer look at the Amish way of life. On one tour, guests can share a private meal with an Amish bishop and his family, learning about their life story and traditions while you relish Amish comfort food.*

*Knowledgeable guides lead all of the Amish Country tour options, ... You may even have the option to stop at a home bakery, where the smell of fresh apple fritters, cheese tarts, and glistening donuts will tempt you into a midday feast.<sup>26</sup>*

Interestingly, another site points out that what is nostalgia for tourists is everyday and contemporary life for the Amish:

*All that stuff about “local,” “seasonal” and “artisanal” is nothing new for the Amish. Of course “new” is hardly what the Amish are about, as a two-hour drive to Holmes County from Columbus engrossingly verifies.<sup>27</sup>*

This could be read as bringing comfort food into the contemporary food scene. It addresses issues that are of current concerns surrounding sustainability, appealing to both environmentally and ethically aware consumers as well as “foodies.” In this way it offsets the nostalgia also carried in comfort food. Home, then, is updated –still familiar, but able to address modern concerns.

Tourism among the Amish has included a range of formats, beginning with classic tours in which busloads of tourists are taken to Amish communities, usually ending in restaurants and shops. The Amish themselves have also developed an extensive hospitality and tourism industry, with tourist “villages” containing restaurants, inns, bakeries, stores, and special events. Among these is one of the most immersive forms of culinary tourism--dinner in an Amish home, prepared and served by an Amish family. These dinners are problematic because of rules limiting interactions with “outsiders,” but some Amish families have developed such tours, developing strategies for presenting the food without actually sharing in its consumption with tourists. These dinners are set up in advance with pre-paid registrations, which can be quite high, and a set menu. The number of tourists that can be accommodated is fairly small, lending an air of “family” and authenticity to these dinners, although there frequently is little actual communication with family members. Even so, the events tend to involve the entire family as well as some community members. The women and girls prepare the food, help serve, and clean up; the boys and men assist by killing chickens, bringing in ingredients, but also by setting up tables. Usually furniture has to be removed so that one long table could be set up to simulate family style eating.

I attended one such dinner in Pennsylvania in 2008. The father, the patriarch of the clan, explained the food, gave a brief history of the Amish, and talked about his family and how they grew and prepared the food themselves. The women served heaping platters of fried chicken, beef and noodles, mashed potatoes and gravy, beans, cole slow, biscuits, lots of pickles, and pies for dessert. Platters were passed around and guests served themselves family-style. I say “guests” with hesitation since we were paying customers and did not know the family or have any connection to them beyond what they offered as part of the tour. The event definitely emphasized home as the central space in which a rural and idyllic notion of family was being performed.

The food represented several aspects of comfort: nostalgia, in that it represented a past prior to modernity, and indulgence, because of the high fat, sugar, salt, and starch content. Convenience also was present for me and the other tourists, although the inconvenience of its preparation was emphasized by the tour operators and in the descriptions of it by the family patriarch. The food itself seemed to be an authentic representation of Amish foodways, although we had no way of knowing what this particular family actually ate at daily meals. Consuming it in this context gave a sense of

participating in the everyday lives of this group of people. It also gave us a point of connection with the Amish as well as with each other—we could talk about the food, discussing similarities with other familiar dishes. The family style dining enabled us to overlook the fact that welcoming strangers into one’s home was generally not an accepted part of the culture and that we were definitely outsiders. The familiarity of most of the dishes, though, helped us feel “at home” and can be interpreted as offering a sense of safety and security rather than the danger associated with exotic foods.

### **Example 2: Classic Comfort Food in Central Ohio**

The second example comes from the Hocking Hills area in south central Ohio, an hour’s drive at most from the capital city of Columbus and known primarily for scenic drives and outdoor recreation. The ad reads as follows:

*2015 Comfort Food Cruise*

*The tastiest event in Hocking Hills spans the next two weekends -- January 31 - February 1 and February 7-8*

*Whether it feels like home, or it’s **your first time** in our neck of the woods, there’s no better way to explore the region than on a cruise through the Hocking Hills. Enjoy the beauty of winter while indulging in some of your favorite comfort foods. For six days, you can taste these dishes all around the region. **Go for the gusto** and try to taste all ten in a day or take a leisurely tour and take as long as six days. Best of all, there are plenty of things to do in Hocking Hills. At the first guilty twinge, just set out for a hike on one of our trails ... In addition to using some of that **comfort food fuel**, you will be treated to a feast for the senses as you pass cave walls covered with ice beards and waterfalls frozen in suspended animation.*

*Tickets: \$15/person. \$5 of every ticket sold will benefit local food pantries.<sup>28</sup>*

The Hocking Hills is not an area celebrated for its food; however, food is usually part of hospitality services, along with lodging and transportation. Tourism Executer, Karen Raymore, of ExplorehockingHills.com, came up with the idea of the comfort food trail as a way to attract more tourists.<sup>29</sup> Organizers felt that local culture could not boast unique dishes, but it could claim a variety of items usually described as comfort foods. Although these might be considered boring food to some tourists since they are not necessarily exotic, gourmet, or high end, they represent the local culture. They then used social media to survey what people thought of as comfort food, identifying some specific dishes. They then took that list to the ten participating restaurants that chose items to add to their menu. The recipes, ingredients, and manner of presentation were left up to the restaurants themselves, doing the best they could and using their own understandings of comfort food and what customers might be looking for. There were guidelines, however, pertaining to the local identity of the dishes. One restaurant had a Scottish theme and wanted to offer a Scottish dish. The organizers decided that it did not fit—“If it’s something you’ve never heard of, it’s not comfort food.”<sup>30</sup> The types of food listed in the announcement would be familiar to most residents of the area as well as to mainstream American food culture: Biscuits & Gravy, Breakfast Burrito, Mac & Cheese, Baked Steak Sliders, Pizza, Meatloaf, Mixed Berry Cobbler, Spaghetti, Chicken & Noodles, Chocolate Ice Cream.

The ten restaurants initially offered those dishes as a sampling, but some also developed them into larger servings and part of the menu. Tourists purchased tickets for the samplings and set their own driving schedules during the weekend of the tour. It was extremely successful. Tourists raved about it, and restaurants were delighted with turnout. They expected one hundred tourists the first year (in 2014), and got four hundred. The second year, they had over 700 people. For 2016, more restaurants want to participate, and three weekends at the end of January are being set aside for the tour

instead of two. According to the organizers, tourists came from in state and surrounding region, but also some international tour companies picked up on the marketing.

The tour highlights several elements of comfort food. The dishes offered are ordinary, everyday fare for many people in this region, and could even be called all-American. Pizza and spaghetti are Americanized to the point that they have lost their ethnic associations, as has the burrito, which has been adapted from southwestern and Mexican American foodways to American tastes and incorporated into the national and commercial foodscape. Meatloaf, macaroni and cheese, and steak are also standards in mainstream menus. The dishes include meat and starch combinations with plentiful dairy and sugar—classic American comfort food familiar to many Americans. Two of the dishes—biscuits and gravy and chicken and noodles—could be associated with region (the first with the South) or even ethnicity (the latter with the Amish or German settlers), but they tend to represent “pioneer” cooking in this region, so fall into the nostalgia category.

The tour also ties this food to natural surroundings and to the seasons. Winter tends to be the usual time for comfort food, when our bodies want something warm and perhaps need more carbohydrates to keep us warm. These dishes belong to Locher’s category of physical comfort food. They also suggest that the normal division of the year is into four seasons. American culture is founded on that expectation and on the resulting moves of social life from indoors to outdoors, reflecting the historical geography of the settlement of the nation in areas, such as New England and the MidAtlantic, that have four clear seasons. Also, the idea of tying comfort food to natural sites and outdoor activities could suggest that the food itself is less “cultivated”—the simpler, plainer style of cooking associated with comfort food is better suited to the enjoyment of nature. This perhaps represents nostalgia for simpler times.

The third category of comfort food utilized here is indulgence foods. The ice cream obviously fits this category, but so can the others because of their heartiness and high fat, sugar, and salt content. The tour recognizes indulgence—even offering that as one of the attractions—but also in its reference to a “guilty twinge” after eating, that can be offset by hiking. The comfort food then becomes fuel, so that indulging in it is actually physically necessary.

The “classic” comfort foods featured in this tour were expected to be familiar to most tourists. They were not being presented as exotic in themselves, nor was the area in which they were found; however, they represented the lack of stress expected to be discovered in this region where appreciation of nature and participation in outdoor recreations were possible. That possibility contrasts with the everyday circumstances of modern living, and therefore is the exotic Other drawing the tourists. As such, the familiarity of the food balances the exoticism, grounding tourists in nostalgic comfort.

### **Example 3: Region, Ethnicity, and Ambiguity: Southwest Indiana Comfort Food Trail**

The third example is from Indiana, a state representing the “heartland” of the nation. As such, its food would be expected to be quintessentially American, reflecting historical patterns and aesthetics. Interestingly, the trail references other regions and ethnicities, almost as if in recognition that the heartland is not exotic enough to elicit tourists’ curiosity.

#### *Southwest Indiana Comfort Food Trail*

*Southern comfort, German heritage and locally grown produce.*

*From fried biscuits at Joe Huber Family Farm and Restaurant in Borden to spatzle at the Gerst Haus in Evansville, the region’s beloved foods reflect Southern influences from Kentucky, German and Swiss roots and the rural heritage of farms and orchards. You*

*can pick your own fruit at Bryant's Blueberries in New Salisbury, visit goats at Cabriole Farmstead Goat Cheese in Greenville, try local wines at Huber's Orchard, Winery and Vineyards and enjoy artisan beer at the New Albanian Brewing company. You'll also find treats that have been favored for more than a century, such as buttery sweet caramels and spicy Red Hots at Jeffersonville's Schimpff's Confectionery or the astonishing crunch of Tell City Pretzels.<sup>31</sup>*

This tour offers more variety than the previous one, listing quintessential comfort foods—biscuits, noodles (spaetzle), cheese, fruit, sweets, “treats”—but adding wine and beer, items that can be considered comfort foods associated more with adulthood than childhood. It also points to cooking processes associated with comfort—fried—as well as ones that show care—artisanal. The “pick-your-own” fruit allows individuals to personalize the food but also evokes a rural past in which everyone participated in harvesting their food. Perhaps most important is the assertion that these are “beloved” foods in the region, suggesting that they are both familiar and hold an emotional attachment for native eaters.

Interestingly, the tour also references another region of the US—the South—that is commonly associated in the public imagination with comfort food, treating it as if that regional food automatically will be an attraction to tourists. It also mentions specific ethnic groups—Swiss and German—which would be considered exotic to some Americans, but it includes these culinary traditions as a familiar part of the Midwestern region's comfort foods. The trail highlights the nostalgia category of comfort food by speaking of heritage and roots. It points out that some of the foods have been regional favorites for more than a century, solidly connecting them to the past. Some of the imagery is also placed in the past—local, farm, orchard, rural—adding to nostalgia. The tour also suggests that these comfort foods fit the indulgence category in referring to some of the offerings as “treats.”

The trail, however, seems to be problematic and not entirely successful. It also suggests that the phrase “comfort food” did not seem to work since the name of the trail was changed in 2015 from Southwest Indiana Comfort Food Trail to “A Southern Comfort Food Trail” and then to “Tour, taste, Traditions: Your guide to Indiana's full bounty.”<sup>32</sup> It turns out that the trail itself was not a local initiative, nor organized as a cohesive tour, but designed by a commercial magazine, *Midwest Living*, that picked out restaurants and designated them as part of the trail. The local and state convention and visitor's bureaus and tourism offices seemed unaware of the trail and even the local restaurants listed had no knowledge of it. When I spoke to the co-owners of one that was described specifically as offering comfort food, neither one had heard of the trail. One of them was hesitant to accept the comfort food label, saying that they preferred to describe their offerings as “real food,” like one would find at “your grandmother's table.”<sup>33</sup> She also noted that, of course, everyone's grandmother might serve different things or might not even cook at all.

These responses suggest the fluidity of the category of comfort food as well as the associations of it with being not “exciting” or exotic enough to draw tourists. After all, many people in that region still eat these foods on a daily basis and would not need to leave home for them. In fact the big draw in the region, according to one tourism provider, was a fall festival in Evansville that boasts that it is the second largest street fair in the country after New Orleans' Mardi Gras. Lasting three days and drawing 200,000 people each day, it definitely does not promote comfort food. Instead, according to its website: “You can certainly find standard festival fare, but more adventurous eaters should look for exotic choices like alligator stew, chocolate-covered grasshoppers and brain sandwiches. Spend a day or two to enjoy all the fun: live music, parades and midway.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Observations: Converging Genres**

Comfort food and culinary tourism seem to be contradictory, if not conflicting, in their emphasis on the familiar and exotic, yet they also share some key features. It is perhaps at these points of similarities that they are able to converge and fit together in a way that does not seem incongruous.<sup>35</sup> Both involve an individual's perspective of what foods fit into those categories. That is, what is comforting to one person might not be to another and what is exotic to one group of people might be familiar to another. This fluidity of boundaries means that tourism and hospitality providers need to constantly negotiate the specific dishes or foodways experiences being offered with the experiences and tastes of the anticipated consumers. In doing so, those providers are also defining what constitutes those categories, so examples both reflect and shape individual and cultural perceptions.

Both categories of food experiences play with balancing the familiar with the exotic, with the familiar providing the baseline, the norm, in a way, for the defining of other experiences. Culinary tourism, in general, can be seen as a negotiation between the exotic and the familiar as well as the between edibility and palatability.<sup>36</sup> A place, event, group, process or artifact needs to be different enough to entice people away from their homes (either physical or metaphorical), but it needs to be familiar enough that the potential tourist feels safe trying it out.<sup>37</sup> Comfort food, in contrast, emphasizes familiar food experiences that will not cause surprise, alarm, or stress. In theory, and by definition, it is the opposite of "eating out of curiosity." In reality, consumers do oftentimes act upon curiosity in how a familiar food will taste in a new context, made with new ingredients, and with new preparation techniques, but the edibility or palatability of the dish itself is usually not in question as it might be in tourism. I suggest here that culinary tourism providers use comfort food to create a sense of familiarity and safety, similar to the observation by tourism researchers, Quan and Wang, that continuing daily routines of food consumption can create an "ontological comfort of home..." that "helps overcome anxieties and unfitness caused by unfamiliar environments on journey."<sup>38</sup>

Both categories also utilize the idea of home as either an actual physical space or a metaphor. Culinary tourism, according to industry definitions, requires literally leaving home in order to travel to another location to experience food.<sup>39</sup> In comfort food, home is referenced through production style—with frequent claims of being "homemade"—and is oftentimes conflated with family—as in serving a group at a table with communal dishes and being called family-style or home-style service. Also, recipes are frequently identified as coming from or imitating those made by grandmothers and mothers, calling upon the traditional gender role of women as rulers and purveyors of the kitchen, the home, and other domestic areas of life. The appearance of comfort food in culinary tourism suggests that the qualities of comfort food—representing tradition, relief, security, and, above all, home—are no longer a regular part of our lives and can therefore be presented as exotic, as Other, and an object of curiosity. If comfort food represents Home as a metaphorical space of security, perhaps Home is now exotic. The sense of belonging that is associated with home, similarly, is no longer found literally at home, but is exotic and sought elsewhere.

Also, both comfort food and culinary tourism are genres—categories carrying their own evaluative guidelines and expectations—that are simultaneously invented ones for commercial purposes and "native" ones that resonate with the general public. An essential theme in both is the opportunity to consume food that is either out of the ordinary or that would otherwise be considered unhealthful. Framing an eating experience as either of those categories then means that the food will be evaluated according to how well it fulfills the expectations of those genres.

In this sense, both categories can be seen as offering spaces in which the usual rules of behavior are suspended, “allowing” us to eat foods we might not normally consider consuming. Such spaces can be thought of as liminal, from the French folklorist Arnold van Gennep who coined the term “liminality” in *Rites des Passage* (1909), which was also described by anthropologist Victor Turner as a condition of being “betwixt and between.” Another definition of liminality comes from Alessandro Falassi who refers to it as “time out of time” in regard to festivals, namely a state of suspension separated from a previous condition and not yet incorporated into the new one. “[F]or me the essence of liminality is to be found in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the ‘uninteresting’ constructions of common sense, the ‘meaningfulness of ordinary life’ . . . . Liminality is the domain of the ‘interesting,’ or of ‘uncommon sense.’”<sup>40</sup>

Tourism scholars have borrowed the concept of liminality to explain behaviors tourists exhibit that they would normally find offensive or even immoral.<sup>41</sup> Applied to culinary tourism, it suggests a psychological frame of mind in which tourists consume—or, at least, taste—foods they would normally see as inedible or unpalatable. Not all culinary tourism needs to be that extreme, however. A tourist might consume foods he or she normally considers unhealthy or outside their usual dietary restrictions, such as large quantities of fat or sugar, larger portions than usual, or different preparation techniques that frequently characterize comfort food. Any type of Other is available for culinary tourism, although the tourism industry tends to highlight the cultural Other.

Similarly, the category of comfort food offers a psychological space in which we eat for emotional reasons rather than nutritional, health, economic, convenience, fuel, or other pragmatic factors. Reframing foods that are frequently considered unhealthy and non-nutritious as comfort foods allows us to justify indulging in them, suspending the normal rules for consumption. Comfort food, then, offers liminality, outside of our usual, everyday lives. From this perspective, both culinary tourism and comfort food can be seen as liminal categories in which we can explore and consume what is exotic or familiar, comforting or disconcerting. As one individual responded in an informal query about these tours: “Calling it comfort food is just an excuse to eat stuff that’s usually unhealthy for me; putting comfort food in culinary tourism is a double excuse!”<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the reality of “coming home” to scales and clothes that no longer fit all too often demonstrates that what we eat during those liminal periods does stay with us.

One final thought is that tourism itself, according to scholars who study it as a cultural phenomenon, is not just a matter of travel—as the tourism industry defines it—but involves a different way of looking at the world. John Urry proposed the concept of the “tourist gaze,” in which tourists look with curiosity, with an openness to see wonder, in objects, activities, places, and people.<sup>43</sup> Individuals can be tourists in name only, in that they are traveling but not be curious about their surroundings. My own formulation of culinary tourism recognizes that the tourist gaze can be turned towards food anywhere, that it involves looking at food with curiosity, with a questioning of its edibility, palatability, functions, aesthetics, history, or meanings. That gaze can also be turned inwards onto our own familiar or everyday foods. In this sense, it looks at what we take for granted as if it is exotic to us, as if it is brand new, and also looks more deeply into it, recognizing its potential to carry meaningful connections. In this sense, comfort food is an ideal subject for the culinary tourist gaze, since it tends to be rich in personal memories and emotional associations.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, these tours—and other examples—suggest that culinary tourism highlights different categories of comfort food, depending on the food culture being featured and the relationship of the anticipated tourists to that culture. Nostalgia and

physical comfort are emphasized in certain settings, but indulgence is a common denominator. These tours give us an opportunity to indulge in foods that we normally would not. Interestingly, the convenience category of comfort foods seems to be implicit in all of these tours; after all, eating away from home means that someone else is doing the cooking and cleaning; the experience is therefore convenient for the tourist regardless of how inconvenient it is for the producers. In fact, the more inconvenient foods are, the more they seem to affirm the status of the tourist as being in a position to indulge.

Furthermore, comfort food seems to play several roles in culinary tourism, again depending on the relationship of the tourists to the food culture being presented. For cultures that are exotic to the tourist, the category of comfort foods offers a sense of familiarity and safety. It then allows tourists to experience someone else's familiar foodways and feel secure while doing so. This might explain why such tours seem to be successful now in large urban areas or in international destinations—both of which would be exotic to many western tourists. The former tend to focus on neighborhoods within cities and feature restaurants there that serve the local community; while the latter frequently offers eating in a home, or in a family-type atmosphere. Framing the food as comfort food defines it as edible and palatable, suggests that the setting is safe, and highlights the commonalities of humanity's organization into families. As Quan and Wang suggested in reference to routine food habits continued during tourism experiences, perhaps the idea of comfort food, whether one's own familiar food or someone else's, creates a "psychological island of home."<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, culinary tourism can exoticize the familiar. Comfort food, by definition is familiar, but featuring it in tourism positions it as an object of curiosity. The simple act of identifying it opens it to new ways of looking at it—as a carrier of memories, a representation of heritage and culture, an artistic statement by a chef, or as a meaningful expression of an individual's beliefs and experiences. Some tours identify the various connections and deeper meanings comfort food offers, while others treat it as needing to be up-dated in some way—such as incorporating local ingredients, new cooking techniques, or more gourmet presentations. The latter approach tends to be the trend within the hospitality and tourism industry, partly because such adaptations can then command higher prices, while the former is found more in projects by educational or cultural organizations.<sup>45</sup> This might explain the ambiguity of the Indiana comfort food tour. Providers were not entirely comfortable with the idea of their food being termed comfort food. Calling it such seemed to suggest that the food was lacking in some way, perhaps in creativity or skill on their part as chefs, or healthfulness of the food, or distinctiveness of it as a culinary tradition.

Culinary tourism in these instances seem to be both affirming the usual understandings of comfort food as representing home and the familiar as well as changing the genre by adapting it to more upscale and healthy eating trends. Both culinary tourism and comfort food are also reflecting and perhaps even driving some trends in the larger western food cultures.<sup>46</sup> Both are highlighting local and sustainable foods that meet ethical concerns. Both are incorporating the shift from treating food just as fuel to recognizing it as expressive of identity and a medium for personal creativity and innovation as well as a social domain. Both also seem to encourage consumption of foods that normally would be suspect in terms either of health and nutrition or of edibility and palatability. At the same time, these tours reflect changes in tourism itself, in which tourists are seeking deeper and more meaningful experiences with other cultures.<sup>47</sup>

The role of home in these categories may also reflect larger patterns within western, even, global society. Stress has increased; fear of the Other has also.<sup>48</sup> Home is both a

place and a metaphor for familiarity and security, but more of us are no longer tied to “Home.” Contemporary technologies have simultaneously “shrunk” the world and isolated individuals who perhaps spend more time with their computers and cell phones than other people. Mobility has taken many of us to new environments, so that home as a place grounded in our past and family literally does not exist for many. Home in the modern world has perhaps now become exotic, the Other, so that it is now an object of curiosity—a destination and attraction for tourism. As anthropologist Richard Wilk pointed out in *Home Cooking in the Global Village*, cooking and eating at home now incorporate those dichotomies.<sup>49</sup> If comfort food gives us the sense of belonging that is traditionally associated with home, incorporating it into culinary tourism offers a powerful way to find our way home while literally away from home.

## notes

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<sup>1</sup> Two examples of popular media featuring comfort food are: *Slow Cooker Recipes* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 1997), with the blurb on front: "Come Home to Comfort Foods" and *Better Homes and Gardens Comfort Food* (Des Moines, IA: Meredith, 1992), with the subtitle: "Yesterday's and Today's favorite dishes." Another example is discussed in a review by Linda Negro, "A Tasty Journey around the World; Book Offers International Comfort Foods," *Evansville Courier & Press (2007-Current)*, June 27, 2012, accessed May 15, 2015, <https://www.questia.com/newspaper/1P2-33124264/a-tasty-journey-around-world-book-offers-international>.

<sup>2</sup> The column appeared in many papers across the country, including *The Des Moines Register*, Sunday, November 6, 1966, 4, accessed February 2, 2015 <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/1131300/>. This usage was noted by Michelle Rhea in a comment added to an online version of the Merriam-Webster dictionary that dates the term to 1977. Accessed February 2, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Richman revisits the term "comfort food" in another essay published in the Washington Post on Dec. 17, 2013, in which she observes that some of the current trends in food seem to be the antithesis of comfort food, such as trying potentially dangerous foods, such as the *fugu* fish or apricot seeds, accessed February 2, 2015.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/comfort-food-she-may-not-have-coined-the-term-but-shes-an-expert-nonetheless/2013/12/16/eb32c150-61c5-11e3-8beb-3f9a9942850f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/comfort-food-she-may-not-have-coined-the-term-but-shes-an-expert-nonetheless/2013/12/16/eb32c150-61c5-11e3-8beb-3f9a9942850f_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/comfort-food](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/comfort-food). Julie L. Locher, "Comfort Food," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, ed. S. Katz. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons (2003), accessed February 9, 2013. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3403400153.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Also see, "Nation Turning to Comfort Food," *Associated Press*, 6 November 2001. Available at <http://www.msnbc.com>, accessed February 2, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Julie L. Locher, William C. Yoels, Donna Maurer, and Jillian Van Ells, "Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journey into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food," *Food & Foodways* 13(2005): 273-297.

<sup>8</sup> This, of course, raises questions about what defines American food culture and whether there is an American cuisine, per se. Comfort food has actually been used in popular media (magazines, cookbooks, televised cooking shows, advertisements for specific foods or restaurants) to characterize an identifiable national cuisine.

She refers to Fischler's concept of the "omnivore's paradox," in which humans have constantly sought both the new and the familiar. Claude Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27/2 (1988): 275-292.

<sup>10</sup> The original study was Jordan D. Troisi and Shira Gabriel, "Chicken Soup Really Is Good for the Soul: 'Comfort Food' Fulfills the Need to Belong," *Psychological Science* June 2011 vol. 22 no. 6 747-753. <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/22/6/747.short> Published online before print May 2, 2011, doi: 10.1177/0956797611407931. A continuation of that study is Troisi JD, Gabriel S, Derrick JL, Geisler A. Threatened belonging and preference for comfort food among the securely attached. *Appetite*. 2015 Jul 1;90:58-64. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.029. Epub 2015 Feb 26.

Also see L.S. Ong, H. IJzerman, A.K. Leung, “Is comfort food really good for the soul?: A Replication of Troisi and Gabriel’s (2011) Study 2,” *Front Psychol* 6 (2015):314. Epub 2015 Apr 1.

More on the intersection of nostalgia, loneliness and comfort food can be found in Karen Stein, “ Comfort Foods: Bringing Back Old Favorites,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 108/ 3 (March 2008): 412, 414, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0002822308000692> and, Cari Romm, “Why Comfort Food Comforts: A new study looks at the intersection of taste, nostalgia, and loneliness,” *The Atlantic* (April 3, 2015), accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/04/why-comfort-food-comforts/389613/>.

<sup>11</sup> Some studies of comfort food have questioned its efficacy and point to the misuse of the concept to justify unhealthy eating. Heather Scherschel Wagner, Britt Ahlstrom, Joseph P. Redden, Zata Vickers, Traci Mann, “The myth of comfort food,” *Health Psychology*, 33/12 (December 2014): 1552-1557, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hea0000068>.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of motivations for food choice, see Michael Owen Jones, Food Choice, Symbolism, and Identity: Bread-and-Butter Issues for Folkloristics and Nutrition Studies (American Folklore Society Presidential Address, October 2005),” *Journal of American Folklore* 120 (2007): 129-177.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Hannah Agran, “Comfort Food that’s Good for You (Veggie Playbook),” *Midwest Living* (January/February 2015), pp. 30-35.

<sup>14</sup> Green bean casserole also demonstrates how a food can have different associations at different layers of society—national, regional, family, and individual. For more on its meanings as a regional family tradition, see Lucy M. Long, Greenbean Casserole and Midwestern Identity: A Regional Foodways Aesthetic and Ethos,” *Midwestern Folklore*, 33/1 (2007): 29-44.

<sup>15</sup> A popular website , *Allrecipes.com*, featured comfort food, asking its readers to identify their comfort foods and send in recipes. The response? “In a matter of just a few days, more than 60 people had offered their ideas on the perfect comfort food. And wouldn’t you know it? No two tastes were exactly alike.” As illustration, readers sent in recipes for items such as Singapore noodles and Indian *tikka masala* as well as the more stereotypical mashed potatoes and chicken fried steak. Accessed February 2, 2015, [What’s%20Comfort%20Food%3F%20Article%20-%20Allrecipes.com.html](http://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/200000/comfort-food-3F-article-20-allrecipes.com.html).

<sup>16</sup> Tourism as an industry is considered to have started in England. Some European countries that are renowned for their cuisine—specifically, France, Spain, and Italy—were part of the “grand tour,” commonly taken by upper class Americans and Europeans as a standard part of education in the 1700 and 1800s. They were ostensibly a part of that tour, however, because of their historical role in the development of western civilization. Domestic tourism within those countries recognized those cuisines as worthy of travel. Excellent introductions to the history and issues surrounding tourism include Erve Chambers, *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000) and Sharon Gmelch, ed., *Tourists and Tourism: A Reader* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> A summary of the history of culinary tourism can be found in Lucy M. Long, “Introduction,” in *Culinary Tourism*, ed. Lucy M. Long (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky

Press, 2004): 1-19 and Lucy M. Long, “Culinary Tourism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffrey M. Pilcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 389-408. Seminal works in the scholarship of culinary tourism include: Anne-Mette Hjalager and Greg Richards, eds., *Tourism and Gastronomy* (London: Routledge, 2002); C. Michael Hall, Liz Sharples, Richard Mitchell, Niki Macionias, and Brock Cambourne, eds., *Food Tourism around the World: Development, Management and Marketing* (Boston: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, 2003), and Lucy M. Long, ed., *Culinary Tourism* (2004). For a perspective from the tourism industry perspective, see Erik Wolf, *Culinary Tourism: The Hidden Harvest: A Dozen Hot and Fresh Reasons How Culinary Tourism Creates Economic and Community Development* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Tourism scholar Mark Hampton points out that the demand for familiar foods is usually associated with mass tourism, and references Stanley Plog whose 1974 model for categorizing tourists characterized conservative, “risk-averse mass tourists” as psychocentric and “more risk-taking, adventurous” and “independent” as allocentric. In his study of backpackers, Hampton suggests that backpackers, who are usually thought of as adventurous, go out into the street for authentic experiences, but return to the “backpacker bubble” where there is a sense of familiarity and stability. There they create enclaves with other backpackers in which they then indulge in comfort foods common to their culture of heritage. He gives an example of Israeli backpackers eating falafel and pita bread together. Mark P. Hampton, *Backpacker Tourism and Economic Development: Perspectives from the Less Developed World* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> The source for my use of the phrase was a documentary shown in classes on the history of tourism at Bowling Green State University, 2009-2011. The video no longer seems to be available.

<sup>20</sup> There is actually much discussion on whether tourists seek novelty or familiarity in their food consumption, or contrast with or extension of their daily life. For example, N. Cohen and N. Avieli, “Food in Tourism: Attraction and Impediment,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(4), 755-778.

<sup>21</sup> The first published use of the phrase, culinary tourism, was Lucy M. Long, “Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 55/3 (1998), then again in 2004, *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> For this listing, see *Encyclopedia of the Midwest*, edited by Joseph W. Slade and Judith Yaross Lee, Greenwood Press, 2004, and its article by Lucy M. Long on “Food Traditions,” pp. 281-322. Also see Lucy M. Long, *Regional American Food Culture*, Greenwood Press, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> <http://allrecipes.com/howto/cuisine-of-the-midwest/>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.1001fooddrink.com>.

<sup>25</sup> (<http://www.ohiosamishcountry.com/listing/guide/dining/> “*Ohiosamishcountry.com* “*It’s About Life—Plain & Simple*”.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.innathoneyrun.com/authentic-ohio-amish-country-tours/Authenticated Ohio Amish Country Tours—posted March 2014>.

<sup>27</sup> G.A. Benton, Road Trip: Comfort Food in Holmes County. In *Crave: The Columbus Dining Magazine*, Spring 2014.

<http://www.columbuscrave.com/content/stories/2014/02/issue/road-trip-comfort-food-in-holmes-county.html>.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.explorehockinghills.com/comfortfoodcruise.aspx>.

<sup>29</sup> Phone call with Audrey Martin, May 20, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> “Indiana’s Official Travel Planning Source

<https://visitindiana.com/trip-ideas/9745-southwest-indiana-comfort-food-trail>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://visitindiana.com/trip-ideas/9745-a-southern-comfort-food-trail>.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Huber Farm Restaurant, starlight, IN, phone conversation.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.visitevansville.com/events/10-05-2015/94th-annual-west-side-nut-club-fall-festival>.

<sup>35</sup> Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of synthesis can be applied here in that two oppositions are being merged, from which something new arises. The question here is whether comfort food culinary tours then represent a category distinct from either of the two “parent” categories.

<sup>36</sup> Long, “Culinary Tourism,” 1998.

<sup>37</sup> For tourism theory about exotic and familiar as motivations for attracting culinary tourists, see C. Michael Hall and Liz Sharples, “The Consumption of Experiences or the Experience of Consumption?: An Introduction to the Tourism of Taste,” in Hall, Sharples, et al (2003): 1-25.

<sup>38</sup> Shuai Quan and Ning Wang, “Towards a Structural Model of the Tourist Experience: an Illustration from Food Experiences in Tourism,” *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25/ issue 3 (June 2004): 297-305. They adapt Giddens’ 1984 concept of “ontological security” to explain how familiar food can give tourists a sense of safety.

<sup>39</sup> Definitions of tourism set mileage for how far from home one needs to be in order to be called a tourist. References.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis,” *Daedalus* 106(1977): 68.

<sup>41</sup> Scholars have looked at the idea of tourism being liminal in relation particularly to explaining sex tourism. See, for example, Denise Brennan, “When Sex tourists and Sex Workers Meet: Encounters within Sousua, the Dominican Republic,” in Gmelch (2004): 151-164.

<sup>42</sup> Stated by a friend of the author’s during an informal discussion.

<sup>43</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

<sup>44</sup> Quan and Wang, “Towards a Structural Model of the Tourist Experience,” 297-305.

<sup>45</sup> For example, tourism initiatives in Canada tried to find ways to present what was considered the bland food culture of much of Ontario. John Selwood, “The Lure of food: Food as an Attraction in Destination Marketing in Manitoba, Canada,” in Hall and Sharples, et al. (2003): 78-191.

<sup>46</sup> By “western cultures,” I refer to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain as well as the US. Culinary tourism in the continental European countries have a different emphasis since many of those cultures have recognizable and renowned cuisines as well as long histories of domestic culinary tourism.

<sup>47</sup> Tourism research demonstrates that more tourists are seeking immersive and educational tourist experiences. This reflects a number of factors, including the shift in

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priorities from possessions to experiences as an indicator of success and social status. See B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (1999).

<sup>48</sup> Locher points out that global events created stress that was then translated into more consumption of comfort foods. “For example, immediately following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, restaurateurs across the United States reported increased sales of comfort food items, such as soup, mashed potatoes, puddings, and macaroni and cheese.” Julie L. Locher, "Comfort Food," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, ed. Solomon Katz. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2003). Retrieved January 23, 2015 from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3403400153.html>. Similarly, see Bret Thorn, "Seeking Comfort, Diners Indulge in Feel-Good Fare," *Nation's Restaurant News*, 15 October 2001 (<http://www.findarticles.com>). A Nielsen survey of grocery stores reported a significant increase in the sales of both snack foods and instant potatoes ("Nation Turning to Comfort Food," *Associated Press*, 6 November 2001. Accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.msnbc.com>).

<sup>49</sup> Richard Wilk, *Home Cooking in the Global Village: Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).