

NATIONAL GASTRONOMY AND GASTRONOMIC TOURISM OF MONTENEGRO ON ITS WAY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

NÁRODNÁ GASTRONÓMIA A GASTRONOMICKÝ TURIZMUS V ČIERNEJ HORE NA CESTE DO EURÓPSKEJ ÚNIE

Vesna VUJAČIĆ* – Marko KUKANJA*, ** – Jovana JANINOVIĆ*

I Introduction

Food serves as a global nexus, intricately weaving together the social, cultural, and natural elements of the regions where it is prepared, thus establishing a profound connection between place and identity, both material and symbolic. Traditions and customs, intrinsic to cultural heritage, endure across generations, serving as a reflection of a nation's essence. They permeate various facets of human life, from seminal events like birth and marriage to festive occasions like slava (the ritual of celebrating the feast day of the family's patron saint), moulding dietary practices, and culinary traditions. Notably, the approach to food and its preparation stands as one of the most vivid and immediate means through which a culture communicates with the world⁽¹⁾. Gastronomy and

tourism share intertwined developmental trajectories, evolving in tandem. Ancient autochthonous dishes serve as historical archives, offering insights into past lives within specific locales, showcasing the indigenous flora and fauna, and revealing culinary customs of yesteryears. Each dish narrates the historical and cultural saga of its place of origin, thereby transforming spaces into destinations rich with narrative⁽²⁾. Despite its significance, research into authentic local cuisine, sourced from indigenous ingredients and served in local eateries (especially in the South East European (SEE) context), remains notably scarce⁽³⁾.

The genesis of tourism in Montenegro aligns with economic advancement, epitomized by the construction

1 Đukić Perišić (2008).

2 Rahman et al. (2018).

3 Peštek et al. (2020).

Abstract (EN)

Montenegro, a Mediterranean gem, boasts abundant natural and cultural treasures, forming the bedrock of its thriving tourism industry. Among its various tourism branches – cultural, nautical, health, and MICE – gastronomy stands out as a potent driver. The indigenous gastronomic landscape not only entices foreign tourists but also fuels increased consumption. This paper endeavours to elucidate the justification and potential of Montenegro's gastronomic tourism by spotlighting its national gastronomy. Gastronomy, intricately linked with destination identity, plays a pivotal role in shaping the destination's image. Drawing inspiration from the Republic of Slovenia's successful declaration as a European gastronomic region in 2021, this paper advocates for a similar trajectory for Montenegro to enhance its tourism brand recognition.

Keywords (EN)

gastronomy, national gastronomy, Montenegro

Abstrakt (SK)

Čierna Hora, stredomorský klenot, sa môže pochváliť bohatými prírodnými a kultúrnymi pokladmi, ktoré tvoria základ jej prosperujúceho turistického priemyslu. Spomedzi rôznych odvetví cestovného ruchu – kultúrneho, námorného, zdravotníckeho a konferenčného – vyniká gastronómia ako silný hnací motor. Domorodá gastronomická scéna láka nielen zahraničných turistov, ale podporuje aj zvýšenú spotrebu. Tento príspevok sa snaží objasniť opodstatnenosť a potenciál gastronomického turizmu Čiernej Hory poukázaním na jej národnú gastronómiu. Gastronómia, zložitá spojená s identitou destinácie, zohráva kľúčovú úlohu pri formovaní imidžu destinácie. Príspevok, inšpirovaný úspešným vyhlásením Slovenskej republiky za Európsky gastronomický región v roku 2021, obhajuje podobnú trajektóriu aj pre Čiernu Horu, za účelom zlepšenia povedomia o značke cestovného ruchu.

Kľúčové slová (SK)

gastronómia, národná gastronómia, Čierna Hora

* University of Montenegro, Montenegro; ** University of Primorska, Slovenia

of the first hotel facilities in the latter half of the 19th century. Archival records trace the origins of Montenegro's hospitality industry to the Lokanda Hotel, inaugurated in Cetinje in 1864⁽⁴⁾. Today, tourism stands out as a crucial driver of Montenegro's economic growth, contributing 30.9% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). This significant contribution underscores the importance of exploring gastronomic resources as central to the development of Montenegro's tourism sector. Notably, Montenegro is currently a prospective candidate country for the European Union, further emphasizing the need to enhance and diversify its tourism offerings.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are twofold: (I) to present the dual role of food in tourism, elucidating its function as both a physiological necessity for travelers and a key attraction driving gastro-tourism; and (II) to highlight the importance of a strategic approach to national gastronomy in shaping a destination's culinary appeal and overall image.

The methodology employed comprises a literature review to assess the current state of gastronomic tourism and its relevance in Montenegro, presentation of the Slovenian Gastronomy strategy, and recommendations for stakeholders in the tourism industry to leverage Montenegrin gastronomic resources more effectively.

1 Literature Review

Food serves as a fundamental physiological necessity for people, and according to Richards (2012), it's also recognized as a creative element in daily life that can attract tourists. Beyond merely satiating biological hunger, food holds a cultural significance, with national gastronomic recipes serving as channels of cultural expression. Alongside the instinctual need for sustenance, humans have developed a hedonistic appreciation for food, finding pleasure not only in consumption but also in its selection and preparation. This hedonistic approach to food finds historical roots in France, where the flourishing of French gastronomy during the reign of Louis XIV, known as the "Sun King," saw chefs crafting elaborate dishes to impress royalty. Contemporary philosopher Michel Onfray introduced the concept of gastrosophy, envisioning a discipline that merges philosophical concepts with nutritional principles, with his book "Gourmet Mind: Philosophy of Taste" forming the cornerstone of this philosophical exploration⁽⁵⁾.

With the onset of globalization and the proliferation of new culinary traditions, tourism has increasingly

centred on food consumption as a neophilic attraction⁽⁶⁾. Today, gastronomy has evolved into an aestheticization of cooking, transcending mere sustenance to become an art form and a burgeoning scientific discipline. Each destination harbours its unique culinary heritage, with authentic dishes waiting to be discovered and packaged as tourist attractions⁽⁷⁾. National gastronomy, a subset of general gastronomy, is defined by its geographical origins and its association with the culture, traditions, and habits of the people, though it has been influenced by factors such as human migration and historical geography⁽⁸⁾.

The evolution of European gastronomy and nutrition can be traced through three distinct waves: from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, marked by the influx of foodstuffs from Asia and America to Europe; the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, characterized by mass migrations from Europe to America; and the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century, which witnessed technological advancements impacting attitudes towards food⁽⁹⁾. In addition to its physiological necessity, food consumption outside the familial context serves a social function, acting as a conduit for social interaction and a reflection of cultural and societal development⁽¹⁰⁾.

In the realm of tourism, gastronomic tourism is gaining traction for two primary reasons: the desire to trace the origins of specific foods and the exploration of new culinary experiences⁽¹¹⁾. Rapid urbanization has prompted wealthier individuals to seek rural escapades, fostering a preference for connecting with local communities and their culinary offerings, thus bolstering the development of gastronomic tourism⁽¹²⁾.

Gastro tourism, as defined, encompasses experiential journeys centred around gastronomic delights, including visits to food festivals, fairs, and interactions with primary or secondary food producers⁽¹³⁾. Beyond culinary experiences, it offers insights into diverse cultures, customs, rituals, and traditions associated with food preparation while also providing valuable knowledge about the quality and attributes of destination-specific products. While research on gastronomic tourism remains relatively sparse (especially in the SEE contexts), it's recognized as an emerging phenomenon and a burgeoning tourism product⁽¹⁴⁾.

6 Hall et al. (2003).

7 Drašković (2016).

8 Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. (2023).

9 Hall and Mitchell (2001).

10 Rizzato et al. (2016).

11 Pavlidis and Markantonatou (2020).

12 Samardžić (2021).

13 Hall and Mitchell (2006).

14 Peštek et al. (2020).

4 Brajović (2009).

5 Onfray (2015).

2 Overview of Natural Resources and Tourism Clusters in Montenegro

Montenegro boasts distinct natural landscapes across its Northern, Central, and Southern regions. With five national parks (Durmitor, Biogradska Gora, Lovćen, Skadar Lake, Prokletije), UNESCO-protected areas (Kotor, Durmitor National Park, and three stećci necropolises), Ramsar sites (Skadar Lake, Tivat Salina, Ulcinj Salina), three protected marine areas (Stari Ulcinj, Platamuni, and Katič), six nature parks, and numerous lakes, the country is a treasure trove of biodiversity. It also harbours six ancient cities (Risan, Perast, Kotor, Stari Bar, Stari Ulcinj, Herceg Novi) with rich cultural-historical legacies shaped by various civilizations such as the Ottoman Empire, the Venetian Republic, and France. Despite its abundance of authentic gastronomic offerings, Montenegro's culinary potential remains underutilized in establishing it as a year-round tourist destination.

The territory of Montenegro is divided into eight distinct tourist clusters, each offering a unique blend of cultural, social, historical, and economic characteristics, thereby presenting visitors with authentic and diverse tourist experiences. These clusters include Ulcinj with Ada Bojana; Bar Riviera with Skadar Lake; Budva Riviera; Bay of Boka Kotor; Cetinje, the former royal capital; capital city Podgorica with the Central Region; Bjelasica, Komovi, and Prokletije; and Durmitor, Sinjajevina with the Tara and Piva rivers. The diversity within these clusters ensures that Montenegro offers a specific, authentic, and unparalleled tourist product.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Montenegro's tourism sector witnessed steady growth in tourist arrivals, overnight stays, investments, and overall revenue. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report for 2019, tourism and travel contributed significantly to the country's GDP with a share of 30.9%, while also contributing to employment (31.9%) and total exports (52.6%)⁽¹⁵⁾. Over the decade preceding 2019, statistics indicate a notable surge in tourist numbers (119%), overnight stays (91%), and total revenue (92%). However, it's worth noting that more than 90% of tourist visits are concentrated in the coastal region, primarily during the brief summer period from June to September⁽¹⁶⁾.

3 History of Food, National Gastronomy, and Regional Cuisine of Montenegro

Historically, Montenegro was characterized by constant wars and struggles, leading to significant suffering among its population. Over nearly a century, the country faced numerous civilization challenges. Consequently, the development of both gastronomy and society as a whole was hindered, not solely due to poverty. These are important reasons why the traditional gastronomy of "Old Montenegro" is not characterized by the variety of cooking techniques and the richness of cuisine. The dishes were simple, but of high energy density. As a geographical area that opens to the Mediterranean, Montenegro has historically been the subject of great interest from the aspect of geopolitical and geostrategic perspective of various civilizations and peoples that were in this territory or passed through this territory. Different nations, different levels of economic development, different cultures, and world views have also formed a different awareness of gastronomy. All these nations have left their mark on gastronomy, so you can recognize dishes that reflect the influence of cultures that were in this region. In the gastronomic offer of the Northern Region of Montenegro, the influence of Turkish cuisine can be felt, and in the Southern Region the influences of Italian, Austrian, and French cuisine⁽¹⁷⁾.

Old Montenegro territorially included the Katun, Lješan, Rijeka, and Crmnica regions, which, in relief, are characterized by hilly, almost inaccessible terrain. At that time, the population was mainly engaged in animal husbandry, and agriculture, and social conditions were difficult. In Old Montenegro, the people lived meagrely, and later, with the development of the state, there was a certain increase in the living standard of the population. The modest life is told by the fact that the dishes for cooking were borrowed, given that they were expensive. Food was not plentiful, but one of the old Montenegrin customs that still exist today is the Montenegrin welcome or hospitality. The guest was sacred, while hospitality was elevated to the level of strictly respected customs and the rules that guests are served only the highest quality food and beverages. To this day, traces of such customs can be seen⁽¹⁸⁾.

Today, the national gastronomy of Montenegro is divided into geographical regions. Each of the regions (Coastal, Central Lake, and Mountain) has a specific food culture, determined by geographical, climatic, and historical differences. Dietary habits differ greatly in

15 Travel & Tourism Economic Impact | World Travel & Tourism Council - WTTC (2019).

16 Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro 2022-2025 with action plan (2022).

17 Đukić Perišić (2008).

18 Perić (2007).

terms of energy value and nutritional composition⁽¹⁹⁾. The main feature of the Mountain Kitchen is the preparation of dishes with the use of a larger amount of meat, namely lamb, veal, and pork meat, and the famous dishes from this kitchen are Montenegrin lamb in milk, lamb under the sač pot, japraci (stuffed collard leaves), smočani kačamak (maize porridge). Moving towards the Southern region of Montenegro, the climate is milder, and the soil is more fertile, so the diet is different. Unlike the mountainous regions, in the Central Region where Lake Skadar is, we have a completely different gastronomy of the so-called Lake cuisine based on fish from the lake, cereals, wine, fruits, and vegetables. Fishing on Lake Skadar is a daily activity of the population of that region. The lake is full of fish, the most famous of which are carp, eel, and common bleak. Famous dishes of this cuisine are Carp with prunes, apple, and quince, Carp baked on onions, Eel on rice, Eel on a skewer, etc. Smoked carp is especially popular, but also dried carp, lightly fried or boiled and served with salad as a side dish. In the areas that gravitate to Lake Skadar, a special speciality is collard prepared with dried meat with the addition of spicy herbs of aromatic mustard, which is also one of the hallmarks of Lake Cuisine in the winter period.

Moving further along the geographical regions, we reach the Coastal region. Coastal cuisine is characterized by simple food preparations, lots of fish, boiled meat, vegetables, olive oil, laurel, and rosemary. This cuisine is delicious, easy, healthy, versatile and nutritionally highly valued. The fish is prepared in several ways: on the gràdele (on the grill), lešo (Fish Soup and Boiled fish), brodet or fried. During the cooking process, the fish is coated with aromatic herbs and served with olive oil dressing with chopped garlic and parsley, and it is usually served with boiled chard and potatoes. The Brodet dish is a world speciality made from several types of fish, vegetables, and olive oil, while in Montenegro, there is one specific type of Brodet, the so-called "The best of all Brodets", which is made only from sardines. Well-known dishes of Coastal cuisine are Sea bass in salt, Fish lešada (boiled fish), Octopus baked with potatoes, Octopus Brodet, etc. In the Coastal cuisine, the local cuisine – so-called Bokeška kužina – (the Cuisine of Boka) stands out. The culture of Kotor, including its cuisine, developed under the influence of seafarers who sailed all over the world, so you can find spices and recipes from all over the world in the Cuisine of Boka. The Cuisine of Boka is a specific local cuisine, its origin is related to the Bay of Kotor, its natural characteristics, and specifics related to the sea,

which is the main source of food for its inhabitants. The cuisine is characterized by the Mediterranean way of preparing food and consists of fish, olive oil, wine, and vegetables, as well as the delicacies Fruštila (Fritule), Dobrotska (roots originate from Venice) and Perast cake, specialities such as Gnocchi, Pašticada (braised beef dish cooked in a fragrant sweet and sour sauce), Raštana na čkljini (Collard prepared with prosciutto bone with a little meat), the best of all Brodets⁽²⁰⁾.

The Mediterranean region of Montenegro favours the development of viticulture and winemaking. Montenegrin wines are mostly dry and rich in tannin. The famous Montenegrin red wine Vranac, Vranac pro corde, is produced from the indigenous variety Vranac, which is compared to the Italian wine Chianti. The golden yellow Krstač wine is also known, followed by Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Crnnik red wine as well. In the world of viticulture, the autochthonous wine varieties Vranac, Kratošija, Krušač, and Žižak are well-known. In Montenegro, there has long been a tradition of making grape brandy, which is perhaps the best ambassador of Montenegrin vineyards. Lozova rakija (grape brandy) is made by distillation from the indigenous Montenegrin wine variety Vranac. The strength of brandy is 50 degrees. It is traditionally served with prosciutto, dried meat, and cheese. It can be consumed chilled as an aperitif. There are several types of brandy such as Prvijenac, Krana, Lozova rakija.

3.1 Gastronomic Tourism of Montenegro

Tourism is one of the strategic branches of economic development of Montenegro, and the year 2019 is taken as the best year in terms of income from travel/tourism from domestic and foreign tourists and represents the unit of comparison for all years before and after that year. Table 1 shows the income from travel/tourism from domestic and foreign tourists, and it can be concluded that the amount of income in 2019 amounted to EUR 1,140 billion (index-109.7), i.e. it is almost twice as much as in 2009 when EUR 597 million was recorded (index-107). Table 1 follows below, showing the amounts of revenues and indices at the ten-year level⁽²¹⁾.

It should be emphasized that food and beverage services are essential elements of the destination's overall tourist offer. The majority of tourists satisfy their travel needs in the hospitality industry, that is, through catering establishments that provide

19 Vujačić and Kovačević (2016).

20 Brajović (2012).

21 Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro 2022–2025 with action plan (2022).

accommodation, food, and other services related to gastronomy⁽²²⁾.

Table 1 Travel/tourism income from domestic and foreign guests in Montenegro (2009–2019)

Year	Amount of income	Index
2009	597 million €	–
2010	635 million €	106
2011	671 million €	106
2012	700 million €	104
2013	721 million €	103
2014	729 million €	101.1
2015	862 million €	118.2
2016	881 million €	102.2
2017	959 million €	108.8
2018	1,039 billion €	108.3
2019	1,140 billion €	109.7

Source: Ministry of Economic Development estimate based on data from the Central Bank of Montenegro, <https://www.cbcbg.me/me/statistika/statisticki-podaci/ekonomski-odnosi-sa-inostranstvom/platni-bilans>

National gastronomy and food are an opportunity to diversify the tourist offer, but also an opportunity to raise the economic growth of the local community qualitatively by involving a wide range of participants (local producers of food, souvenirs, shops, markets, etc.). The specifics of the gastronomic offer are obvious, but gastronomic tourism in Montenegro is developing slowly. The frequent claim that Montenegrin cuisine could not develop due to the poverty of the population is not well founded. Many regions in France, but also the southern regions of Italy, were known for their poverty, but people managed to imaginatively transform their modest foodstuffs into dishes, which today are known and recognized all over the world (e.g. pizza from Italy).

It is evident that Montenegro is a receptive tourist destination with an aspiration for better recognition on the international tourist market, therefore, all the capacity of authenticity must be preserved by better introducing local, original from the aspect of gastronomy and gastro-tourism, and thus improve the recognition of the brand of Montenegro as a destination.

In the Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro, in operational goal no. 4., which refers to the improvement of the quality of the diversified tourist product of Montenegro, food is mentioned only in event tourism as part of the offer of events that serve as an opportunity for local producers of food, drinks, and souvenirs to present their products to

a larger number of people, and for tourists and the local population, the events are an opportunity to participate in local festivities, to taste food, drinks or to buy local products⁽²³⁾. €

3.2 The Food Safety Standard of Montenegro

In the hospitality industry, in addition to the gastronomic aspect, great attention is paid to food from a health-safe aspect. Food safety is of particular importance as it aims to limit to a minimum the contamination of physical, chemical, microbiological, radiological or other hazardous substances that pose a health risk to consumers⁽²⁴⁾.

In the countries of the European Union, food safety is defined through the document Codex Alimentarius Commission – CAC and Guidelines for the Application of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) System. The application of the HACCP principle in the European Union is legally defined primarily by the following documents – Regulation EC No 178/2002 (General Food Law); Regulation EC No 1642/2003 – amendments to the previous law; Regulation EC No 852/2004 – general regulation on hygiene; Regulation EC No 853/2004 – regulation on hygiene products of animal origin as well as others.

The first Law on Food Safety in Montenegro was published in 2007. The Montenegrin Law on Food Safety, currently in effect, defines the obligation of all food business operators to establish, apply, and continuously maintain procedures based on the HACCP principles at all stages of food production, processing, and distribution after primary production⁽²⁵⁾.

Guided by the experience and practice of European countries, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Montenegro published the Guide to Good Hygiene Practice in 2017. Since the application of HACCP is binding in Montenegro⁽²⁶⁾, it should be emphasized that a large number of hotels in Montenegro (e.g. Chimera – Podgorica, Hilton – Podgorica, Astoria – Kotor, Splendid – Budva, Palas – Budva, Iberostar – Perast and many others) have HACCP certification as well as a person responsible for the implementation of good manufacturing, hygiene practices. When we look at the harmonization of European Union legislation in the field of food and the legal legislation of Montenegro,

23 Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro 2022–2025 with an action plan (2022).

24 Varga et al. (2006).

25 Law on Food Safety (Official Gazette of Montenegro (No. 57/2015).

26 Law on Food Safety (Official Gazette of Montenegro (No. 57/2015).

22 Reynolds et al. (2021).

then it can be said that Montenegro is on the right (European) track and that food is health-safe.

The foundation of national gastronomy, diverse regional cuisines, and a robust legal framework in the food industry, based on European standards lay down a solid groundwork for enhancing the catering sector and elevating gastronomy standards. Moreover, they serve as a cornerstone for accelerating the growth of gastronomic tourism in Montenegro.

4 The Gastronomic Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia

Unlike Montenegro, the Republic of Slovenia is a good comparative example of understanding the importance of national heritage through the promotion of gastronomy, food, and authentic dishes. The Republic of Slovenia and Montenegro have a common (ex-Yugoslav) history and belong to similar gastronomy clusters.

Slovenia's geographical and cultural diversity serves as a fertile ground for the development of its gastronomic identity. Situated at the crossroads of the Alps, the Mediterranean, Karst, and the Pannonian Plain, Slovenia is a melting pot of diverse cultural influences. In the north, the Germanic culture prevails, while the west is characterized by Romanic traditions. Slavic culture dominates the south, while the east bears the imprint of Hungarian heritage. This rich tapestry of cultures has played a pivotal role in shaping Slovenia's gastronomic landscape, fostering a vibrant culinary scene that reflects the country's multicultural heritage⁽²⁷⁾.

In 2006, Slovenia took a significant step forward in promoting its gastronomic heritage with the formulation of the Strategy for the Development of Slovenian Gastronomy⁽²⁸⁾. This strategic document serves as the cornerstone for the promotion and advancement of Slovenian cuisine on both domestic and international fronts. A key component of this strategy is the development of the gastronomic pyramid, a framework that underpins Slovenia's culinary identity. The pyramid encompasses 24 gastronomic regions, each with its unique culinary traditions and specialities. Additionally, it includes three wine regions comprising nine vineyard areas, showcasing Slovenia's rich winemaking heritage. With 365 authentic dishes, representing each day of the year, the gastronomic pyramid celebrates the diversity and richness of Slovenia's culinary heritage.

The culmination of Slovenia's gastronomic journey came in 2021 when the country was declared a European gastronomic region. This prestigious designation is a testament to Slovenia's commitment to promoting its

diverse gastronomic offerings and authentic products. It is the result of collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders, including government bodies, culinary experts, local producers, and tourism organizations. Together, they have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of Slovenia's culinary treasures and enhance its culinary reputation on the global stage. The declaration of Slovenia as a European gastronomic region not only underscores the country's culinary excellence but also highlights the importance of collective action in advancing national gastronomy. By leveraging its cultural heritage and gastronomic diversity, Slovenia has positioned itself as a culinary destination par excellence, attracting visitors from around the world eager to savour its unique flavours and culinary traditions⁽²⁹⁾.

Tourism contributes around 12% to Slovenia's GDP, a smaller share compared to Montenegro's 30.9%. Despite this difference in economic importance, Montenegro can still learn valuable lessons from Slovenia's success in gastronomic tourism⁽³⁰⁾. As Montenegro embarks on its gastronomic journey, it can draw inspiration from Slovenia's achievements and adapt its strategies to harness its gastronomy potential. By doing so, Montenegro can enrich the overall tourism experience and drive its economic growth.

II Conclusion

Guided by the successful experience of our Slovenian colleagues, the authors of this paper advocate for the implementation of a similar strategy in Montenegro. As managers of the bilateral project "Authentic Gastronomy: How do tourists perceive us – are we really so different?" (2023–2024), they underscore the importance of leveraging Montenegro's rich culinary heritage to attract tourists and enhance the overall visitor experience.

Creating a stronger connection between gastronomy and the destination experience is crucial for making Montenegro's national gastronomy and regional cuisines with authentic dishes more appealing to tourists. Today, Montenegrin cuisine, with its unique blend of Western European, Mediterranean, and Oriental culinary traditions, carries a distinctive local touch that has the potential to captivate visitors. Recognizing the significance of tourism, efforts to develop an authentic and recognizable gastronomic product are essential for Montenegro's tourism industry.

Montenegro boasts abundant natural and cultural resources, making it ripe for tourism development.

27 Bogataj (2007).

28 Lebe et al. (2006).

29 Peštek et al. (2020).

30 Kukanja and Peštek (2020).

Local authentic cuisine is increasingly being used as a marketing tool to attract foreign tourists and drive increased consumption. Authentic dishes and local products not only add value to the destination but also enhance its competitiveness. This provides a solid foundation for the growth of gastronomic tourism in Montenegro, an area that is currently underdeveloped.

In the realm of gastronomic tourism development, preserving and promoting the recognition of Montenegro's food, beverages, and national gastronomy is paramount. This not only preserves the culture, traditions, and customs of the destination but also drives innovation in tourism and fosters economic growth. Gastronomic tourism has a multitude of benefits, including job creation, extending the tourist season, stimulating regional agriculture, enhancing destination competitiveness, promoting cultural heritage, and strengthening local identity.

The positive affirmation of national gastronomy, regional cuisines, and gastronomic products, as demonstrated by Slovenia's declaration as a European gastronomic region in 2021, serves as a compelling example for Montenegro. In conclusion, sustainable utilization of natural and cultural resources, coupled with continuous diversification of products through better recognition and positioning of Montenegrin gastronomy, will ultimately contribute to a destination that offers more than just sun and sea.

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Contact address/Kontaktná adresa

assoc. prof. Vesna Vujačić, PhD.

University of Montenegro
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management
Stari grad 320, Kotor, Montenegro
✉ vuvesna@ucg.ac.me

assoc. prof. Marko Kukanja, PhD.

University of Primorska
Faculty of Tourism Studies
Turistica, Obala 11a, 6320 Portorož, Slovenia
✉ Marko.kukanja@fts.upr.si

doc. Jovana Janinović, PhD.

University of Montenegro
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel, Management
Stari grad 320, Kotor, Montenegro