UNIT 12 CUISINES, CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

Structure

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

• know the role of cuisine in the development of Tourism,
• understand how a well founded knowledge of local customs can enhance your effectiveness as a tourism professional,
• learn how existing festivals and fairs can be incorporated in a tourism plan to the benefit of local people as well as the visitors to this country, and
• identify some areas in which one needs to exercise caution in the development of tourism.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit highlights the necessity to learn about the role of cuisine, customs and festivals in relation to tourism. This is relevant in the context of both international as well as domestic tourists in order to provide better hospitality and services. In fact it is a must for all those involved in tourism trade to understand and appreciate local customs. This is necessary to avoid misunderstandings between the tourists and locals. Similarly, it is essential to know about the main festivals and fairs that have over the years become major tourist attractions. And as far as cuisine is concerned we all know that different regions in India have their own specialities to offer to the tourists. These are the various aspects dealt with in this Unit along with an initial overview related to the themes.

12.2 AN OVERVIEW

The most rewarding travel experiences are those which involve all our senses. And so, the traveler in search of new and memorable journeys is likely to seek places which can offer him or her history and scenic beauty. Along with this experience feature the excitement and pleasure of:

• sampling new cuisines,
• participating in local customs and cultural events, and
• experiencing the fun of local celebrations.

The desire for a fuller and more satisfying travel experience makes it imperative that we make every effort to provide situations in which the visitor and the visited
can meet and share each other’s lives in a meaningful way i.e. one which will enrich both the parties concerned.

Cuisine, everyday experiences, rituals, festivals and fairs are all such ways in which a traveller can get beneath the surface of things. By doing so one is able to participate in the social environment which creates the unique and specific flavour of a place.

In India, where the family is still such a strong and enduring unit, it is sometimes difficult for a stranger to get a taste of its astonishing range of culinary preparations. Every state, every community and every family has its own specialities. These are often inaccessible to those who are not part of that particular region, community or family group. For example a visitor to Kerala might be familiar with Idli, Dosa and Vada but Appam is a name he or she may not even have heard of. Similarly, social and religious rituals are often performed within the home and festivals are celebrated by a family and its close associates. By extension, even public occasions such as fairs are known to those who regularly attend them and in whose lives they are an annual event. To somebody who is visiting India as a stranger, it may be difficult or almost impossible to know in advance:

- when such an event is likely to occur,
- where it happens or how to get there,
- what to expect in terms of being able to see, and take part in all the activities that a fair provides.

One of the most important roles of a tourist organisation of any sort is that of disseminating information. And once such information has been gathered and disseminated, the organisation has to act as a conduit to provide avenues through which the tourist may gain access to the cuisine, customs, fairs and festivals of the country or region they are visiting.

India as a destination poses special problems to almost everyone in the travel trade. This is because we have such an abundance and embarrassment of riches. A beginning has been made. State tourism departments, magazines and books etc. all provide an astonishing range of information. Certain fairs have been identified as potential tourist destinations. Infrastructure has been created to make it possible for travellers to attend these fairs. Here, they participate in the social environment which nurtures the traditions behind such events and enjoy the local cuisine. The annual Pushkar Fair near Ajmer, which is known the world over, can be sited as one such case.

However, one of the questions that tourism raises is that of privacy for the inhabitants of a host country/region (especially in a country such as India) and that of intrusion in the lives of people. A ritual may be a sacred or a very private occasion for those who are carrying it out. To an insensitive tourist it may be just another spectacle, to be photographed and documented. Thus, arise questions like how far we are willing to open our doors and observances to the curiosity of visitors? How far they ought to be permitted to peer over our shoulders during festive and ritual occasions? These are some vital issues which need to be discussed and debated if tourism is to develop in a balanced and sane manner.

Tourism has many benefits, both for the host country/region and its people and for those who are visiting. However, there is also a destructive side to unthinking mass tourism that we need to guard against. Visitors can and must be sensitized to the environment to which they are going. If they are to participate meaningfully in the customs or festivals of a community, they must come in a respectful and open frame of mind. While it is not possible to ensure such attitudes, it is certainly essential for a member of the tourism trade to do everything in his or her power to prepare a visitor by providing information in the form of written material and verbal communication to attune them to the unfamiliar environment they are about to enter. They can also warn them of those things which may cause unwitting offense or embarrassment.

A happy travel experience is one in which both the visitor and those who have
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been visited experience a high degree of comfort. Taken in its widest connotation, this not only means physical comfort in the way of having a clean and pleasant place to stay, sit, travel, eat and exist, but also a psychic comfort that comes from being at ease in one's mind. The visitor should be confident that he or she is doing the right thing and is not being asked or expected to do something that may be too far outside their experience. A westerner unused to Indian ways, for example, may find it disturbing to have to take off his or her shoes and walk barefoot down an alley that leads to a temple or a dargah. Similarly an Indian is often very uncomfortable with the idea of joota (first eaten by someone else) food being passed around, which a westerner may not even notice.

Often, comfort of this sort comes from being prepared, from having some idea of what to expect and being willing to participate in an activity which may be unfamiliar. Which brings us once again to the pivotal role of information being provided to a visitor. This is true not only for overseas visitors to India but also for domestic tourists (Indians from one state or community visiting another area). The failure to provide adequate information often results in a situation which may be seen in almost any popular hill station. For example, tourist buses pour in with holidaymakers at their most inconsiderate. They litter the small hill town, fill it with loud music and louder chatter, complain because they do not have all the big city amenities they are accustomed to, and treat the local people as either slaves or crooks. Examples of this abound in popular tourist destinations and may account for the antipathy many local residents feel for those very visitors who bring prosperity to their towns and villages. This is true of what is happening in many hill areas such as Mussorie, Ooty, Nainital and in other places of tourist interest all over the country such as Goa.

A great deal of the misunderstanding and resentment caused by tourism can and must be mitigated by those involved in the tourist trade. The later have the potential to act as mediators between the various expectations and demands that tourism engenders.

It is always worth the time and trouble to explain local customs and to keep local sensibilities in mind. Visitors should enjoy their visit but not at the cost of the local populace.

The keywords to remember in this area would be preparation and planning as is true of almost any field of activity. Do your homework and share your information would be an ideal motto for every person involved in tourism. In addition, the ability to stay cheerful, to think positively and to make each event exciting and valuable are all important qualities for a tourism professional to develop if he or she is to accomplish anything.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What do many visitors look for when they travel, in addition to monuments and a pleasant place to stay?

2) Why is it essential for tourism professionals to sensitise visitors to the feelings of the local populace?
3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark √ or X.

i) There is no need for a tourist to respect local customs.

ii) A prominent function of any tourist organisation is to disseminate information.

iii) Tourists must be told in advance the do's and dont's.

12.3 CUISINE

Generally tourists are very cautious as to what they eat while holidaying. However, their eating expectations can be classified thus:

- They may look around for their familiar food. An example of this is the European tourists flocking at Narula's Pot Purri in Connaught Place at New Delhi or a person from Delhi searching a place in Trivandrum to get Nan and Butter Chicken.

- They might like to try the local dishes at a destination with which they are not familiar. India offers a large variety of cuisine which is very much region specific also. Vindaloo from Goa or Murg Mussalam from Lucknow and what not. Hence, it is of great significance that the menu should contain the ingredients of the dish as well. Whereas most of the big restaurants do this many small ones don't understand its relevance. An amusing outcome of this could be the waiter trying his best to explain the difference between rice Pulao and Biryani.

- At times they also try dishes whose praise they have heard from others or dishes mentioned in the guide books. There are occasions when they depend on their tour escort or the waiter to guide them.

- Some may require special meals like vegetarian only or as may be the case with some domestic tourists, food without onion and garlic.

- Many tourists realise that in case they don't get food as per their expectations at least they can have boiled eggs, omelet, sandwich, toast, butter and jam or fruits which are commonly available in India.

- They may also opt a restaurant of their choice like one day for Chinese food and another for Mughlai.

- In certain cases they eat out as per the image or reputation of the place and cuisine offered they already know of from their own place of residence. For example a Marwari Bhoj or vaishnav hotel would mean vegetarian food and a dhaba must have dal as a special dish irrespective of which town they are located in.

In fact like the dishes, food and catering services also differ from destination to destination. There are Fast Food restaurants and even restaurants of special interest which offer special cuisine like the Frontier in Ashoka Hotel or Dasa Prakash in Ambassador Hotel at New Delhi. But we must remember here that the tourists spend as per their budget. For example, a low budget tourist may not eat at Frontier but have roasted non vegetarian food at a small restaurant or a way side dhaba also. A recent survey of international tourists in India conducted on behalf of the tourism ministry (in 1988-89) mentions that the package tourist spends 13.96 per cent and a non package tourist 18.53 per cent of his total expenditure on food/drinks.

Eliciting appreciation of an unfamiliar cuisine involves a great deal more than preparing authentic local food and serving it in clean and pleasant surroundings. While many visitors may like to eat with place settings and implements to which they are accustomed, it is always exciting for them to have the option of eating as the locals do. For example, one of the most popular restaurants in New Delhi,
is the Bukhara at the Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton. At the Bukhara, which features northwest frontier food, there are no knives and forks. In keeping with its style, visitors are expected to eat with their fingers. Most guests are delighted to put on the roomy aprons, which the restaurant supplies, and to dig into the kebabs and rotis with their fingers, even if they have never eaten in this way before. It is part of the experience.

As almost every Indian knows, Indian food served in traditional vessels is tastier and more enjoyable to eat than that which is served in a plate with spoons, forks and knives. There is a special pleasure in eating in a thali, or in having tea in a mud khullar, or dosas on a banana leaf. Presenting genuine local specialities in the way they are normally served adds to the pleasure of eating them. But, here again, it has to be done in a way which is comfortable and enjoyable for those to whom this is a novel experience. In other words, the restaurant or home should be geared to that style of eating and those who come here should know in advance that the food and the style in which it is to be served will be a little different to what they are accustomed. Restaurants such as Vishala in Ahmedabad and Chaukidhani outside Jaipur are other fine examples of how this has been done successfully.

Speciality restaurants, such as these, are one way in which visitors and local residents can ‘plug into’ cultures and customs that are different from their own. However, even a more general sort of restaurant can offer its guests an exciting and authentic culinary experience by arranging food festivals which bring alive the cuisine of a region or a community for a brief period. This is often done through appropriate decor, music, serving style and of course, authentically flavoured specialities. A coffee shop for example, becomes a South Indian restaurant every weekend. Rangoli designs on the doorstep and a doorway of banana fronds outside announce the change of style. In the restaurant all the food is served on banana leaves and a chef makes fresh dosas for all those who want it, in addition to all the other special foods for which the south is famous. Regular visitors to this restaurant know about its weekend transformation and make plans to go there during this time. At the same time there would be people who may not otherwise patronise this particular restaurant but come here to sample their special wares which have established an excellent reputation in the town.

The other kind of food festival is a one time event, organised for a limited period, such as a week or 10 days. If it is a food festival featuring another country, it is often possible to get assistance in the way of information and materials from airlines and embassies who are glad of the opportunity to promote their own countries.

12.4 CUSTOMS

In a food festival the ambience of atmosphere is an important element in planning and executing the event. Hence, this brings us to the customs of a particular culture.

How does one communicate the customs and style of one region to people who have little or no knowledge of the region? And how do we do so in such a way that it is a comfortable and happy occasion, one that is just plain fun without too much information or evident ‘learning’ going on? A delightfully easy means of achieving this is through participation. People on holiday often enjoy getting involved with a ‘hands on’ experience. In several hotels in Rajasthan, this is done by using the visitors’ fascination for local clothes. Turbans and lehngas (Indian form of long skirts) interest almost everyone who goes to Rajasthan. To wear a turban or a skirt and attend a theme dinner, where local food is served and local dancers invite the diners to join them in their simpler dances makes a joyous occasion for all concerned.

Instead of passively watching things as they have probably done in their sightseeing buses all day, the visitors are being asked to dress up and to take part in a local style of dancing. This at once becomes a festive and memorable occasion.
In Goa, on a river cruise up the river Mandovi in Panaji, passengers are entertained by a local band and dancers. They get a taste of Goan music and dance and soon they are being asked to join in the simpler choruses. Long after the holiday is over the holidaymakers remember the song and its catchy tune. They have carried away a little bit of Goa with them, in addition to souvenirs and memories of Goan beaches.

Theme dinners are an effective way in which an entire holiday experience can be built around a local meal. In dealing with tour groups, theme dinners are often built into a particular package and sometimes prove to be a highlight of the holiday. A banquet area can be transformed into a village for a rustic theme, or a palace for a royal banquet or anything else that the travel professional's imagination can devise. An exciting variation can be a theme dinner in spectacular location, such as the ramparts of a local fort or on a cliff overlooking the sea, or on a barge on the river. The imagination and innovation that travel professionals bring to their jobs can ensure that there are no ends to the number of themes that are possible in a country so culturally rich as ours. Here again, the ingredients of a successful theme dinner would be:

- atmosphere,
- participation,
- authentic cuisine,
- convincing fantasy, and
- an adequate degree of animation.

The concept of animation is something which is just beginning to be taken seriously in our country. A simpler way of putting it would be to call it participatory activity.

A visitor to a new city is often overwhelmed by all there is to see. This is particularly true of India where every travel destination has such a wealth of monuments and bazaars, emporiums and places of interest. However, to the visitor, a great deal of the day's activity consists of trailing through one monument after another, passively absorbing information being offered by guides and brochures, taking in innumerable new impressions and merely looking on. As a change and relief from all this passivity, it is necessary for visitors to be able to take part in some enjoyable activities to round out the day. Hotels and travel professionals can make this possible by creating events and activities that provide excitement and pleasure. For example, kite flying in season, elephant or camel rides, hands on demonstration of local crafts including cooking, games and treasure hunts and pastimes of every sort can complete an individual's day in a happy and interesting manner. And this is where local games and customs can be woven into a stranger's itinerary to enrich his or her experience of being in a new environment. It is not enough to make all the arrangements for an individual's visit. If we are to grow as a travel destination, it is essential that we look seriously at the idea of animation and see if we can animate places such as monuments and scenic areas in addition to hotels. Sound and Light shows, activity related trails through major monuments, post offices cum cafes at tourist-friendly locations, music and dance are all ways in which we can make destinations in India more appealing for all those who visit them and for all those who could be motivated to come.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Explain what a theme dinner is? Mention its ingredients.
2) Why is it important to arrange participatory activities for visitors to a new place?


3) How can local customs help to make a visitor’s experience more memorable?


12.5 FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

Festivals are the high points in any individual’s calendar. And, conversely there can be no greater loneliness than being in a strange city during a festival and not being able to enter into the spirit of the day’s events. Certain festivals are observed within the serenity of the home and they should remain so, but several of our festivals lend themselves very well to being shared with visitors and travellers to our country. The most obvious of these are Dussehra and Diwali. The burning of Ravana effigies in public areas in north India, the Puja of Bengal, the fair at Kulu for Dussehra and the fireworks of Diwali can all be made more accessible to the visitor. In each case, the idea of being in a large crowd could be alarming for those who are not used to it. But guided tours in small groups, a public display of firecrackers at Diwali, arrangements for festive meals at hotels and other public places could all help to make some portions of our major festivals a shared event.

Certain traditional festivals and the fairs associated with them have already become a part of the traveller’s itinerary, such as the Dussehra celebrations at Mysore in Karnataka or Kulu in Himachal Pradesh. Other culture-based festivals have been created and nurtured most effectively, such as the annual festival of dance at Khajuraho (See Unit 10, TS-2) and the more recent festival at Mahabalipuram. These are an effective means of focusing attention on a particular area. It is a form of animation in highlighting an exciting event that draws visitors to the location as well as sending out information and creating public awareness of the destination through media coverage. There is no end to the number of such events which are possible. Tansen’s seat at Fatehpur Sikri, the great rock-strewn ruins at Hampi, Golconda fort at Hyderabad, Tipu Sultan’s forts, innumerable forts and palaces in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Orchha, Bundi etc. and the potential is infinite. All it requires is the enthusiasm of all those concerned, the desire to do it authentically and carefully, and some degree of professional skill.

A key resource in making such festivals a success is the media. Brochures and books are a necessary part of the travel industry. But these only come into use when a traveller has already made the decision to travel to a particular location or at least registered an interest in that location. However, there is a vast untapped reservoir of possible visitors who would enjoy visiting a particular place if only
they were made aware of all that it has to offer. One way of reaching such individuals is through advertisements. The other, and this probably has far greater reach and credibility, is through articles in newspapers and magazines. There are travel writers and writers on food, on clothes, on crafts, on sports, on painting and a whole host of other subjects. Many of them could be introduced to a destination through what it may offer them in their particular field of interest. Here again, for the travel professional this involves identifying the writers concerned, doing one’s homework and being adequately prepared to provide information and opportunities to these writers who are read by the public at large and whose integrity and competence are beyond question. (See Unit 23, TS-1).

Whereas festivals can be divided into traditional events and those which have been recently created to highlight a particular destination or event, fairs are generally part of an older way of life, of trading activities of the past or connected to a festival and part of local cultural patterns. To make an existent fair something that can be promoted as a tourist event needs a great deal of thought and careful planning. The needs of the local populace for whom the fair is a business opportunity as well as an opportunity to meet and celebrate, and the expectations of visitors who may come to the fair in search of a quaint travel experience ought to be balanced. While the influx of a large number of strangers may provide added trade opportunities and the potential for local entrepreneurs to earn money, the new visitors shouldn’t inundate the traditional activities which form the basis for the fair. This dilemma is to be seen in many areas, such as crafts, in terms of capricious new markets taking over a product or an event and then abandoning it to move on to the next novelty, and thereby distorting and then destroying it. It is particularly valid in terms of social events such as a local fair. Individuals involved in the travel and tourism business must be aware of pitfalls such as these and make their decisions only after they have fully examined the possible repercussions of what they are proposing to do.

Assuming a local fair has the possibility of being developed as a tourism event, the effort should always be to retain the fair’s own character and to involve the local people in enlarging and expanding it to meet the needs of outsiders. It is all too easy to get into a situation where the bonafide local visitors to the fair are edged out by more affluent outsiders with disastrous results. To succeed, a fair has to retain its own original and unique character. Certain facilities and infrastructure is necessary to cope with increased numbers; e.g. basic facilities such as accommodation, arrangements for safe drinking water and food, security and transportation. But it is important to retain the regional and local flavour of the event, its rural character and the trading activities for which it is held. If the same urban shops and stalls, entertainment and cuisine are poured into a local fair, it loses its character and therefore its reason for existence. It is no longer worth a tourist’s effort to travel some distance to participate in the event. Integrity, authenticity and a respectful regard for local customs are once again the hallmarks of development in this field. Compromise on any one of these factors, and one is in danger of destroying the whole delicate fabric of the activity.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Why is it important to exercise caution in developing local fairs as tourist attractions?

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2) How can the media help to popularise festive events?

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12.6 LET US SUM UP

To succeed, tourism needs to be developed in a sensitive and carefully considered manner. Both social and natural environments depend for their existence on a delicate balance of myriad factors. Those that would introduce dramatically new elements into an old and established way of life must do so in an aware and well considered manner. Cuisine, customs, festivals and fairs are all a part of the activities of tourism. Each has the potential to affect the wider picture, hence, those involved in these activities must understand all that tourism implies for the benefit of the nation and the dangers that are inherent in this field of activity.

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) For example, sampling new cuisines, participation in local events, sharing views, etc.
2) This is essential in order to avoid hostility and ill-feeling which might emerge from the actions of a tourist who may even unknowingly offend the sentiments of the locals.
3) 1) ×  2) √  3) √

Check Your Progress 2

1) Creating a particular atmosphere around a theme for dinner. For example, the theme could be eating in the forests or farm land. Atmosphere, convincing fantasy, authentic cuisine etc. are the necessary ingredients for a successful theme dinner. See Sec. 12.4.
2) To provide her him relief from a feeling of passivity. See Sec. 12.4
3) They can be woven into tourist itineraries. See Sec. 12.4.

Check Your Progress 3

1) To prevent them from losing their own character. See Sec. 12.5.
2) See Sec. 12.5.
### SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

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<th>Title</th>
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<td>Dharamarajan and Seth</td>
<td>Tourism in India</td>
<td>New Delhi, 1994</td>
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<td>Jag Suraiya &amp; Anurag Mathur (ed.)</td>
<td>A Portable India</td>
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<td>Joan L. Erdman</td>
<td>Arts Patronage in India</td>
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<td>Tourism Development in India</td>
<td>New Delhi, 1992</td>
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ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BLOCK

Note: Discuss the activities with your counsellor at the study centre.

Activity 1

Make two menus for two separate food festivals of two days each featuring the food of an Indian region of your choice. List the other arrangements you would make to ensure the success of the festival. You may use the following sample as a guideline.

1) Caption:  
   Punjabi Khanaa  
   Prahjai ait hai aana  
   Penjee noo vi nall laiana  
   (Punjabi food, O! brother come here. Bring sister also along with you.)  
   Welcome address at the entrance  
   Aau Badshah Aau Bibiji

2) Menu Day-1:  
   Sarso ka Saag  
   Makki di Roti  
   Lassi da Gilas  
   Meethai Shakar Parai

   Menu Day-2:  
   Chole  
   Pathura  
   Kulcha  
   Chawal

3) Scenario:  
   Village, with cots and murhas lying around to sit and eat.  
   Folk lore/folk dance  
   Songs of Heer Ranjha/Bhangra dance.

4) The waiter to be dressed in Punjabi attire, while handing the visitor a thali the address should be: lau badshao or lao praajee.

Activity 2

Describe in detail the most prominent festival of your area after a visit. The points you may highlight are: history; what goes on/in the fair; the type of people who visit; attraction; cleanliness etc.

Activity 3

Pick up any three customs of your area. Interview at least ten people seeking their opinion on whether they would like to share these customs with outsiders. If yes, why and if no again why?

Activity 4

Prepare a short note on the cuisine of your area and how can that be presented to tourists as an added attraction.

Activity 5

Plan for a theme dinner.
Activity 6

A person is on a business visit to your city and he is free from work by 5 pm. What would you suggest him/her to spend time.

Activity 7

A person has meetings in Bombay on Friday and Monday. He is free on Saturday and Sunday. Make an itinerary for the person for these two days.

Activity 8

Plan a cultural evening for tourists of 2 hours duration.