the business of tourism, culture & gastronomy
A look at the Asia-Euro link

What impact has globalisation had on the business of tourism, culture and gastronomy in Asia and Europe? There seems to be a greater awareness today than ever before of the current trends in these regions. More people are interested in food and are conscious of where innovations in cooking are taking place. Business ventures in gastronomy have mushroomed over the last few years. Exotic cuisines and ingredients are now widely available in the open market. Similarly, the travel industry has
evolved with known destinations reinventing themselves, and new forms of tourism providing novel experiences to places less travelled. The interest in and appreciation of other cultures across the globe is more evident today as communication barriers are diminished in this age of globalisation.

The links between tourism, culture and gastronomy are obvious, but the cross-cultural connection between Asia and Europe is part of an inter-disciplinary study between these three fields only goes back to the last decade.

establishing the link
How much have these studies contributed to globalisation? How much has globalisation fuelled these studies? Have the cross-cultural fusions in tourism, culture and gastronomy been successful in business endeavour? Are there any caveats to future collaborations? Should collaborations be planned or just allowed to unfold? Do the collaborations bring equal benefits to the collaborators?

To discuss this agenda, over 150 academicians, policy makers, industry professionals and students from around Asia and Europe gathered together at the first ever Asia-Euro Tourism, Culture & Gastronomy Conference 2006 hosted and organised by ERITA-Asia, the Centre for Inter-disciplinary Research in Hospitality, Tourism and Food at Taylor's School of Hospitality & Tourism in collaboration with University of Toulouse, France.

Taylor's School of Hospitality and Tourism Chief Operating Officer Pradeep Nair says:

"Globalisation is fast changing the tourism and hospitality business. For example, many exotic cuisine and ingredients are now widely available, while the travel industry has evolved with known destinations constantly reinventing themselves to meet the ever-evolving tourists. New forms of tourism also provide novel experiences to places less travelled, and in the long run, all these can have serious implication on how the food and tourism industries are operated in this 'new age' of modernity."

In a couriered message from Dr. Henryk Handszuh, Chief, Improving Competitiveness Department, Quality, Investment, Trade, Health, Safety & Security of the World Tourism Organisation, he says: "It is especially rewarding that this conference is taking place in Asia, the cradle of the most enriching currents in culinary arts. Asian cuisine has shown that, in general, it easily adapts to new culinary trends and tastes, and yet, at the same time, firmly retains its original idiom and serves as an inspiration elsewhere in other regions, including Europe. Asia is therefore so important for international tourism and better understanding among people."

He further explains that globalisation is a synonym of a significantly higher level of international exchange or trade. Since immemorial times food products have been the objects of trade, which have brought with them food and cuisine internationalisation. The quest for spices allowed Europeans to first discover and then colonise other lands which they found exotic. They exported to them their eating habits and took back home plants, seeds and animals found in the new destinations. The so-called French fries (actually Belgian ones) and the "typical" Mediterranean tomato have their origin in the Inca Empire, the Polish strawberry has been
imported, through France, from what is now Chile, and the "English" five o'clock tea has travelled to the British from Ceylon.

**The influence of food**

Within Asia, India and Malaysia have considerably influenced each other's tables. History books trace this influence back to as early as the fourth century when Indian traders went to the Kedah province. Tamil workers in the British plantations of sugar, coffee and rubber deepened the process.

The ubiquitous coffee started its conquest from the Horn of Africa thanks to Arab traders. Today it re-conquers the world through Starbucks, founded in 1971 in Seattle. The coffee house had in 1999 hosted a failed Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation during which the anti-globalisation movement became manifest and notorious. One of the reasons for the failure was a disagreement, not overcome until today, over subsidies and trade in agricultural products, as well as related fito-sanitary measures.

Tourism, a by-product of trade (business travel), internationalisation (meetings) and the result of the availability of disposable income for leisure expenditure, has now become a powerful agent of globalisation and accelerated the process of food internationalisation.

Alongside immigration and among other effects, it reproduces and spreads national cuisines, prompts demand for, and hence trade in, foodstuffs of foreign origin, or encourages them to grow in new places, often by "assisted" methods.

The need of considerable food supplies for leisure tourism consumption arises within the same geographical regions; truckloads of frozen beef from farms around Paris make their long way to the Algarve province in Portugal, and shipments of frozen potato chips sail at the port of Formentera in the Mediterranean.

**Food in tourism**

International tourism has also given a strong impetus to fast-food, which is especially preferred by young travellers. Today's fast food, or rapidly servicing simple standardised meals in large quantities, also has its foot in the past.

Leonardo de Vinci took the following note (Romanoff Codex): "I've been thinking again about bread and meat: what about placing meat between two chunks of bread? And how could we call this dish?" Two centuries later, John Montague, called the Fourth Count of Sandwich unwittingly helped invent a generic name which eventually...
developed, towards the end of the nineteenth century, into hamburger in its meat filling version in the United States.

The fundamental role of food in tourism is widely recognised. First, it has to satisfy, in terms of content, safety and variety, the nutritional needs of the traveller. Secondly, it serves as a powerful vehicle of socialisation, with locals and travel companions. Thirdly, it is a primary factor of tourism attractiveness.

When asked about their tourism experience, virtually all travellers refer first to their eating experience. Food, especially local food, transmits and helps understand culture in the place visited. While international cuisine at tourism destinations serves as a referent of common denominator and safety between visitors and the visited, local food and cuisine helps diversify the tourism product and hence make it more competitive. Each variant carries with it different economic impacts.

While international and imported cuisine prompts food imports and thus increases the level of destination dependence, the use of local food in tourism creates linkages with the local economy and can make it more sustainable.

the conference
With Malaysia in full gear in welcoming an estimated 20.1 million tourists this year with the Visit Malaysia Year 2007, the conference was timely as it provided industry practitioners, policy makers, academics, students and all relevant parties involved in the food and tourism industry invaluable insights into current developments and trends in the industry.

The international conference was also held in conjunction with the 20th Anniversary celebrations of Taylor’s School of Hospitality and Tourism - University of Toulouse alliance. Aptly themed ‘West Meets East,

A Recipe for Success in this Era of Globalisation?’, the conference offered participants an opportunity to discuss the effects of globalisation on tourism, culture and gastronomy in Asia and Europe as well as explore in depth the issue of cross-cultural fusion in the three fields.

While international and imported cuisine prompts food imports and thus increases the level of destination dependence, the use of local food in tourism creates linkages with the local economy and can make it more sustainable.

Over the two days, there were 11 speakers for the keynote addresses and forums. In addition, 28 speakers presented their research papers in concurrent sessions on topics related to food and gastronomy, culture, tourism development and tourism and hospitality education.

The Best Paper Award went to Dr Jennifer Kim from the University of Sabah Malaysia (UMS) for her insightful paper on ‘Herzberg’s Dual Factor Theory as Applied to the Tourism Experience: Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers’. Using Herzberg’s dual factor theory of satisfiers and dissatisfiers to identify the nature of tourist experience attributes, she found that the attributes include both personal experience (satisfiers) and performance of service providers (dissatisfiers).
Staying Ahead of The Game

Singapore gears up to capture the lion’s share of BTMICE revenue

Aloysius Arlando, Assistant Chief Executive of STB's Business Travel & MICE group