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DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE TRADITIONAL-MODERN FOODWAYS OF THE JIZZAKH OASIS POPULATION AND THEIR ROLE IN DEVELOPING GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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Abstract: *This article examines the composition of the traditional and modern foodways of the population of the Jizzakh oasis and the natural-geographic and ethnocultural factors that shaped them. It describes the local character of the oasis dishes and their contemporary transformation, and argues that they hold real potential for gastronomic tourism. The article proposes ways of turning local dishes into tourism products through gastronomic routes, festivals, geographical indications, staff training and better information services.*

Keywords: *Jizzakh oasis, foodways, traditional dishes, gastronomic tourism, ethnolocal features, Zaamin kazan patir, tourism product.*

Food is among the most stable and, at the same time, the most changeable layers of a people's material culture. On the one hand it reflects the economy, natural conditions and religious and everyday beliefs inherited from earlier generations; on the other, it is constantly renewed under the influence of urbanization, market relations and tourism. Studying foodways is therefore essential for understanding the ethnocultural profile of a region [1]. The Jizzakh oasis is a distinctive area of Uzbekistan that joins mountain foothills, irrigated plains and steppe. Its position at the meeting point of several historical regions allowed very different cultures and customs to merge [7]. At the same time, gastronomic tourism is recognized worldwide as one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry [3; 5], and in Uzbekistan the sector has received state-level attention [6]. The aim of this article is to analyze the traditional and modern sides of Jizzakh foodways and to show their potential for gastronomic tourism. The study uses historical-comparative and systemic analysis and a content analysis of published ethnographic, geographic and tourism sources, supplemented by open information materials.

The distinctiveness of the oasis cuisine is first of all tied to its natural-geographic setting. Three broad economic-cultural zones can be identified: the mountain and foothill villages on the slopes of the Turkestan and Nurota ranges, including parts of Zaamin, Bakhmal and Forish districts; the plains with rain-fed and irrigated farming; and the steppe and semi-desert belt around Mirzachul and Arnasay. In each zone the balance of flour, dairy and meat products, the use of wild plants and the methods of preparing food have differed. A second factor is the ethnic composition of the population. Besides Uzbeks, the oasis is home to Kazakhs, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Russians, Tatars and others, and more than seventy nationalities are recorded in the province [7]. The Uzbek population itself grew out of several tribal and clan groups, and this is reflected in village-to-village differences in cooking habits. Observations by B. Kh. Karmysheva and other researchers show that economic and everyday differences between local groups persisted in Uzbekistan for a long time [2]. A third factor is the type of economy. Alongside farming, livestock breeding, including sheep and horse breeding, has long been important in the oasis. The fact that weddings were traditionally accompanied by kupkari (ulak), and the wide range of horse-related rituals, point to the cultural weight of this branch [4]. In such conditions some meat and dairy products, such as qazi and qarta

made from horse meat and various dried dairy products, became part of the festive and hospitality table.

The traditional dishes of the oasis can be divided into several groups. The first is bread and flour dishes. Bread is the most respected element of the table, and tandoor bread, qatlama and patir are widespread. In Zaamin district a kind of bread called kazan patir has long been made from local milk, butter and a specially kneaded dough, and is baked in a cauldron; its registration as a geographical indication in 2025 shows how a local food can become a brand [8]. Among flour dishes one can also name lagman, chuchvara and manti. The second group consists of soups and thick dishes such as shurpa, mastava, mashkhurda and plov. Plov is the core dish of weddings, funerals and hospitality. In villages it is cooked in a cauldron over an open fire, usually by men, which strengthens the social role of the dish. The third group includes grain and porridge dishes such as atala, umoch, yovgon khurda and zogora. Collections of Uzbek delicacies note that such foods used to be called the food of the poor [11]; today they attract interest as authentic village dishes. The fourth group covers dairy products and sweets: yoghurt, suzma, qurt, cream and butter, as well as bogirsok, qatlama, nabat and halva. In villages with Kazakh and Kipchak populations, dishes characteristic of pastoral traditions, such as beshbarmak, kymyz, bogirsok and qurt, are still served at celebrations. The oasis cuisine is therefore not a single tradition but a mosaic of several ethnolocal variants.

Over recent decades local foodways have changed considerably. Urbanization, the wide availability of food in markets and the growth of public catering have pushed part of the village repertoire out of everyday diets. At the same time a process of standardization is under way: lagman, plov, shashlik and samsa look the same on menus everywhere, and regional differences are fading. On the other hand, this very globalization has renewed interest in local foods. The registration of geographical indications, home-cooking services, guest houses and the initiatives of farms and agritourism enterprises are examples. The modern menu is being built on a traditional foundation: old recipes are kept while presentation, tableware and service culture change. Such a traditional-modern cuisine is the most convenient basis for gastronomic tourism.

In the international literature food is treated as a link between regional identity, cultural heritage and the local economy [3; 4], and the reports of the World Tourism Organization list food among the key factors in a traveller's choice of destination [5]. In Uzbekistan the potential of gastronomic tourism has been discussed using SWOT analysis and statistical data [9]. Jizzakh province has several advantages. It has natural and recreational areas, mountain villages and lakes where ecotourism and rural tourism can be developed, and the gastronomic offer can be packaged with them as one product [10]. Because the province lies between Tashkent and Samarkand, there is a constant flow of transit visitors. And the regional diversity of dishes makes it possible to create a separate food brand for each district. There are also problems: the lack of a systematic recipe base, weak service infrastructure in mountain villages, insufficient staff qualifications, and few information materials explaining the history and meaning of dishes. Food tourism should not turn dishes into a caricature of themselves, so their recipes, methods and cultural functions need to be presented on a scientific basis, and the village "home recipes" and the skilled cooks who hold them should be documented and valued.

Several directions of work seem appropriate. First, local recipes should be collected through ethnographic expeditions and published in books and on electronic platforms. Second, gastronomic routes, for example a "bread and dairy trail" in the foothills and a "pastoral food trail" around the steppe and lakes, should be designed and linked with mountain, desert and pilgrimage sites. Third, an annual food festival and master classes on regional brands such as tandoor bread and kazan patir

would extend the tourist season. Fourth, programmes are needed to standardize home-catering services in village families and to teach hygiene requirements; vocational schools and colleges could offer short courses on national dishes, hospitality and guiding. Fifth, menus and promotional materials should present not only the name and history of a dish but also the customs and etiquette connected with it. Information services such as a province food map, mobile applications and printed guides can show where and in which season each district's signature dish can be tasted and how visitors can take part in preparing it. Finally, the use of local milk, butter, flour, meat and vegetables should be encouraged through direct cooperation with farms.

Experience elsewhere shows that food can become the core of a regional brand when local products, recipes and places are presented together. Gastronomic routes built around regional products, such as cheese, wine or olive trails, lead the visitor through several places and raise the income of a number of local enterprises [3; 4], and the inclusion of gastronomy among the fields of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network shows that food is recognized internationally as cultural heritage. The same idea can be adapted to local conditions in Jizzakh. Visitors could follow the making of bread, butter and qurt in foothill villages or join the preparation of plov in a steppe settlement, and such participation in the process is what modern travellers value most. Gastronomic tourism, however, is not limited to the dish itself. It also depends on the service environment, transport, accommodation and information. Roadside eateries and village guest houses need to observe sanitary standards, menus should be clear and available in several languages, prices should be transparent, and a short note on the name, composition and local origin of each dish would considerably enrich the visitor's experience.

The question of personnel is equally important. Local cooks, bakers and pilaf masters are highly skilled, but many of them lack training in working with tourists, communicating in foreign languages and service culture. Short courses in vocational schools, colleges and universities on national dishes, hospitality and guiding, together with a link between the master-apprentice tradition and formal education, would be effective. Involving rural women and young people in family entrepreneurship would also strengthen the economic stability of the area. A final risk should be mentioned: adapting a dish to tourist tastes may strip it of its original meaning, so documentation and respect for the people who hold the recipes are as important as promotion.

Seasonality offers a further resource. Foothill villages have their own spring foods made from wild greens, summer brings melons, grapes and dried fruits, autumn the harvest and the wedding season, and winter the stored grain, dried meat and dairy products on which village households have always relied. A tourism calendar built around these natural cycles, with a spring greens week, a harvest festival and a winter hearth season, would spread visitor numbers across the year and give households a steadier income. Such a calendar would also help protect local food from overexploitation, because it ties demand to what the land and the herds can sustainably provide, and it allows visitors to see the dishes in the setting in which they were created rather than as a menu item detached from place.

Finally, cooperation between local authorities, universities and village households will decide whether these ideas succeed. A small coordinating body could keep a register of recipes, certify participating kitchens and monitor visitor feedback, so that the quality of the food experience in every district remains consistent and the benefits are shared fairly among families.

Progress should be measured as well as planned. Simple indicators such as the number of certified home kitchens, the share of local products on restaurant menus, the length of visitors' stay and household income from food services would show which measures work and where

adjustments are needed, and would allow the province to learn from its own experience as the sector grows.

To conclude, the foodways of the Jizzakh oasis were shaped by natural-geographic conditions, the type of economy and a multiethnic population, and consist of bread and flour dishes, soups and thick dishes, grain and porridge dishes, and dairy and sweet dishes. Today they are changing under two opposite pressures, standardization and the rediscovery of local traditions. Regional diversity, experience with geographical indications and the possibility of combining food with natural and recreational areas make the oasis cuisine an important resource for gastronomic tourism. The proposed measures would help turn the dishes into a tourism product, raise rural incomes and preserve local cultural heritage.

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