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Smaki Gdanska – cultural regeneration through food tourism



Gdansk, Poland



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Introduction

The "Smaki Gdańska" (Tastes of Gdańsk) initiative is a sustainable cultural tourism project that revives and regenerates Gdańsk's culinary heritage by adapting 19th-century recipes to contemporary tastes. Initiated and coordinated by the Gdańsk Tourist Organization, the project works closely with local chefs and restaurants, who interpret historical dishes using traditional methods and regional ingredients, breathing new life into forgotten flavors. By drawing from sources like the 19th-century "Gdańska Książka Kucharska" (Gdańsk Cookbook), chefs become cultural curators – bridging past and present through creative culinary storytelling. This initiative not only enhances the city's cultural identity but also regenerates local food traditions, strengthens ties between history and modern life, and stimulates the regional economy.

It gives both visitors and locals the chance to discover and enjoy Gdańsk's culinary history in a hands-on, meaningful way – bringing old recipes back to life while supporting local chefs, restaurants, and producers in a thoughtful and sustainable manner.



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The Practice

Building on the city's historical culinary roots, the "Smaki Gdańska" project has grown into a dynamic cultural tourism practice that integrates gastronomy, education, and local enterprise. While rooted in historical inspiration, the initiative is forward-looking in how it activates local food culture as a meaningful part of the urban tourism offer. It transforms traditional knowledge into a living experience, making Gdańsk's heritage accessible through everyday encounters with food.



The project includes a wide range of coordinated efforts. Local chefs design menus that reimagine old dishes for today's diners, often highlighting seasonal and regional products. To support and promote these efforts, culinary maps and printed or digital guides are produced, helping residents and tourists discover participating restaurants. Events such as tasting tours and food-focused programming during Gdańsk's St. Dominic's Fair serve as major outreach platforms. Additionally, the initiative is connected with local engagement tools like the Gdańsk Tourist Card and Resident Card, encouraging participation from both locals and visitors.

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Outreach

"Smaki Gdańska" targets a broad and inclusive audience. Tourists looking for authentic and enriching experiences are drawn to the project's immersive character. Local residents are invited to reconnect with their city's identity through food, and often discover little-known elements of Gdańsk's history. Key stakeholders include restaurants, chefs, and food producers who actively shape the culinary offer, as well as the Gdańsk Tourist Organization and city authorities, who provide coordination, funding, and promotional support. The project also fosters partnerships with cultural institutions, event organizers, and local media.



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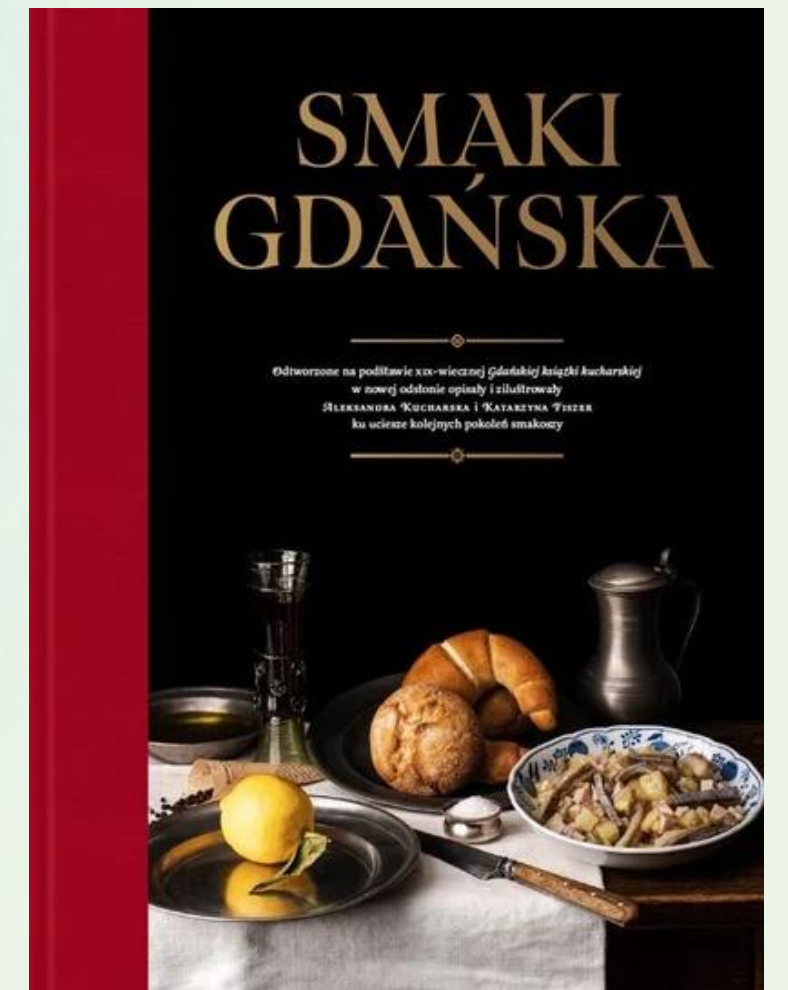
Local Benefits and Impact

Beyond its role as a cultural attraction, Smaki Gdańska generates tangible benefits for the local community. Its focus on traditional foodways and regional cooperation strengthens multiple dimensions of urban life—from the economy to the environment. The initiative acts as a catalyst for sustainable local development, with positive ripple effects across sectors.

Cultural Impact

The initiative reinforces a sense of place by reintroducing forgotten culinary traditions and making them part of everyday urban life. It promotes the continuity of local knowledge and crafts, giving chefs and restaurateurs the tools and confidence to treat heritage as an asset rather than a novelty. As recipes are revived and reinterpreted, they contribute to an evolving yet deeply rooted cultural identity that resonates with both locals and visitors.

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Beyond cultural recovery – local impact



Social Impact: By offering residents opportunities to engage with their culinary heritage—whether through special events, restaurant experiences, or storytelling—"Smaki Gdańska" nurtures a stronger local identity. It also helps bridge generational gaps by making traditional knowledge relevant to younger audiences in a contemporary context.

Economic Impact: "Smaki Gdańska" contributes directly to the local economy by encouraging culinary tourism and increasing foot traffic to participating venues. By prioritizing locally sourced ingredients, the project supports regional producers and supply chains, creating additional opportunities for small businesses, farmers, and food artisans. Restaurants benefit from increased visibility and a unique cultural offer that differentiates them in a competitive market.

Environmental Impact: By focusing on seasonal, regional ingredients, the project promotes low-impact food practices and encourages environmental responsibility in the hospitality sector. Reduced reliance on imported products lowers the carbon footprint, while the emphasis on fresh, local produce aligns with broader sustainability goals such as reducing waste and promoting biodiversity.

Visitors Benefits and Impact

For visitors, Smaki Gdańska offers more than a typical dining experience. It invites them to explore the city's heritage through taste, encouraging a deeper connection to place and its eventful history.



Cultural Engagement and Education

For visitors, the project offers a gateway into Gdańsk's past through one of the most engaging and universal mediums: food. Historical dishes become a storytelling tool, offering insight into the social, cultural, and economic life of the city in the 19th century. Menus often include background information, and events provide opportunities to learn directly from chefs and guides, turning a simple meal into a cultural learning moment.

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Visitors Benefits and Impact



Behavioral Impact on Visitors

By promoting local and seasonal dining, the initiative encourages visitors to make more sustainable and conscious choices. Travelers are inspired to seek out authentic, locally grounded experiences rather than generic tourism offers. This often leads to increased interest in supporting small businesses, attending cultural events, and understanding the places they visit more deeply.



Immersive Experience

Eating becomes an experience that stimulates not just taste but also memory, imagination, and connection. The combination of culinary storytelling, local hospitality, and historical context offers a multisensory way of engaging with the city. Visitors leave with not just photos and souvenirs, but meaningful memories and a better understanding of Gdańsk's cultural fabric.

Sustainability Measures

Cultural Preservation

One of the core values of "Smaki Gdańska" is safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. By documenting, sharing, and celebrating historic recipes, the initiative ensures that local culinary traditions are kept alive and passed on. Chefs and restaurants become active stewards of this heritage, interpreting it in ways that respect its origins while adapting it to today's context.

Economic Sustainability

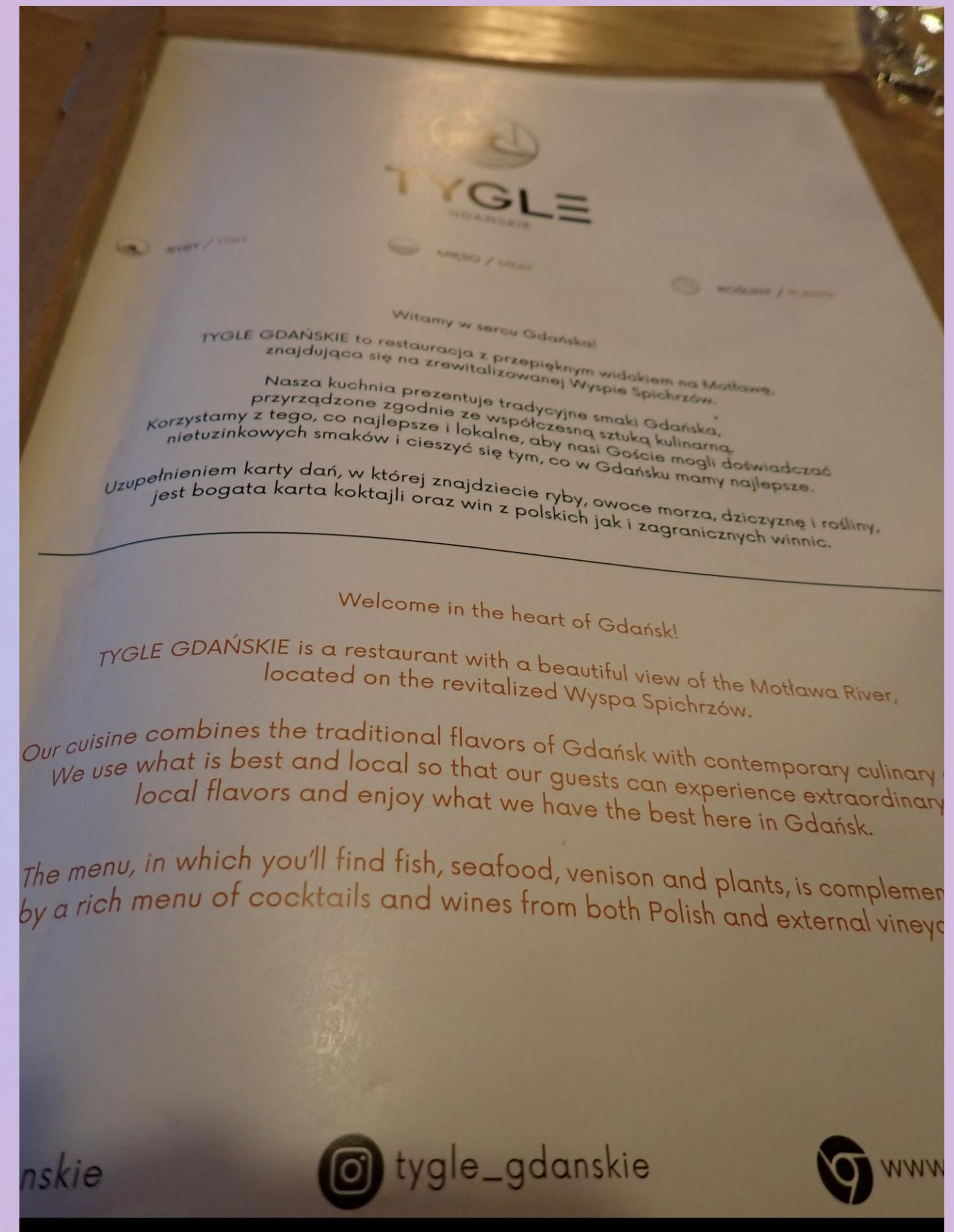
The project offers a replicable and scalable model for integrating heritage into the tourism economy. By providing restaurants with a year-round thematic offer and connecting them to broader promotional platforms, it helps stabilize revenue streams beyond seasonal peaks. The economic benefits are distributed locally and reinvested in the cultural and hospitality sectors.



Sustainability Measures

Resource Preservation

A commitment to using fresh, seasonal, and locally sourced ingredients supports more sustainable food systems. This reduces transport emissions and supports practices that are better aligned with ecological health. The project also promotes a mindset of thoughtful consumption—highlighting quality, provenance, and care in both food preparation and presentation.



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Community Involvement

The success of Smaki Gdańska depends not only on chefs and institutions, but on the active participation of the wider local community. From residents rediscovering their culinary roots to small producers contributing ingredients and stories, the initiative fosters a shared sense of ownership and pride in Gdańsk's food heritage.

Local Engagement

Through events, tastings, and culinary walks, the project invites residents to engage directly with Gdańsk's historical cuisine. These experiences aren't limited to passive consumption—they often involve storytelling, dialogue, and opportunities to learn more about the city's past. Initiatives such as the Resident Card make these cultural experiences more accessible and inclusive for locals.



Tastes of Gdańsk DUET Package

It tastes better together. Take a culinary journey with your special someone. You choose your companion, we provide attractions. Or more precisely - an unforgettable experience of Gdańsk cuisine.

Tastes of Gdańsk QUARTET Package

In a team of four, you will see even better that this city is more than Neptune, the Baltic Sea and shipyard cranes. Check out what Gdańsk tastes like.

[Read more](#) >

Community Involvement



Collaboration with Local Producers and Artisans

Regional food producers, farmers, and small-scale artisans are vital contributors to the initiative. Their products—rooted in place and tradition—help shape authentic dishes and reinforce the connection between local land, labor, and flavor. By sourcing from these partners, restaurants participating in Smaki Gdańska strengthen short supply chains and build community resilience.

Intergenerational and Cultural Dialogue

The project has sparked new conversations between generations, as older residents share family recipes and memories tied to Gdańsk's culinary past. These stories enrich the project's narrative and ensure that food heritage is passed on, not just preserved in books. The involvement of young chefs and students also brings fresh energy and creativity to the tradition, ensuring its relevance for the future.

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Monitoring and Evaluation



The Gdańsk Tourist Organization, in coordination with local partners, tracks project outcomes through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Key indicators include:

- Participation levels in culinary events and tours
- Visitor and resident feedback (e.g. satisfaction surveys, social media engagement)
- Restaurant involvement and sales performance linked to historical menus
- Media coverage and public awareness

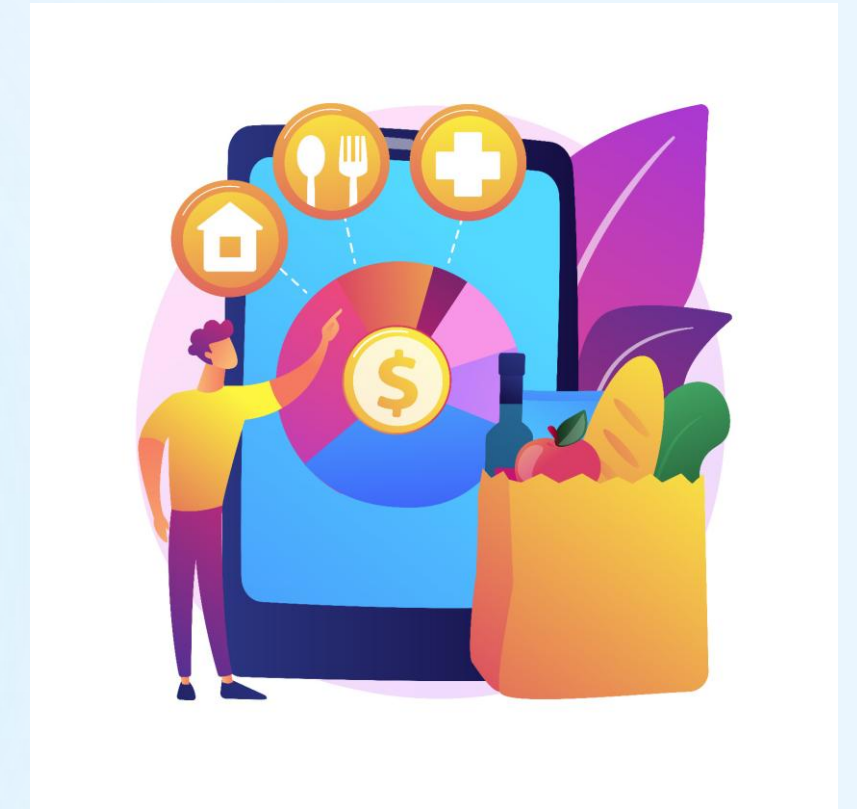
Regular feedback from participating chefs and restaurants is also collected to refine the offer and ensure historical authenticity is balanced with culinary creativity. Informal community input—through storytelling sessions, workshops, or social media—is considered a valuable part of evaluating cultural resonance and inclusiveness.

Adaptive Approach: Evaluation results are used not just for reporting but to guide iterative improvement. For example, event formats, promotional tools, or featured dishes are adjusted annually based on audience response and seasonal trends. This adaptive approach helps the initiative stay relevant to both residents and tourists.

Financing

The project is primarily funded and coordinated by the Gdańsk Tourist Organization, with financial and in-kind support from:

- The City of Gdańsk and local government bodies
- Participating restaurants and food producers (through promotional partnerships)
- Sponsorships and partnerships with local cultural institutions, media, and event organizers
- EU and regional cultural heritage or tourism development grants (where applicable)



Some events and printed materials are co-financed through public-private collaborations, reducing costs and strengthening stakeholder investment. Additionally, programs like the Gdańsk Tourist Card help generate revenue while reinvesting in local cultural infrastructure.

Replicability and Scalability

The core concept—reviving historical culinary traditions in partnership with local chefs and promoting them through tourism channels—can be adapted to different regional contexts. Key ingredients for success include:

- A documented or researchable culinary heritage (e.g. old cookbooks, oral histories)
- Strong collaboration between tourism bodies, cultural institutions, and the hospitality sector
- Community participation and openness to reinterpreting tradition
- Communication tools that translate heritage into engaging visitor experiences



Other cities with rich but underutilized food traditions could adopt a similar approach by tailoring menus, events, and partnerships to their own historical and cultural context.

Transferable tools and practices

The use of culinary maps, branded guides, themed events, and integrated visitor cards can be easily adapted for other destinations. Likewise, the practice of involving chefs as cultural ambassadors, and of using food to create experiential storytelling, is both scalable and culturally rich.



By embedding heritage in everyday cultural and economic life, Smaki Gdańska ensures its relevance beyond temporary trends. Its model encourages cities to view culture not as a static resource to be preserved, but as a living system that can be shared, adapted, and sustained through creativity, participation, and care.

Key Conclusions & Takeaways

Use Culinary Heritage as a Gateway: Local food traditions are an accessible way to engage with intangible heritage. Start with recipes, cookbooks, and oral histories.

Empower Chefs and Producers: Treat chefs as cultural storytellers, not just service providers. Connect them with local producers to build a rooted, sustainable food chain.

Involve the Community from the Start: Co-create with locals. Their knowledge, pride, and participation are essential for authenticity and long-term success.

Make Heritage Part of Daily Life: Embed tradition in modern experiences—menus, events, and local programs—rather than isolating it in formal settings.

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Key Conclusions & Takeaways



Create Immersive, Educational Experiences: Use food as a tool for cultural education. Sensory, place-based learning deepens understanding and encourages respectful visitor behavior.

Start Small, Grow Smart: The model is adaptable. Begin with pilot events or menus and scale based on interest, feedback, and resources.

Think Long-Term, Not One-Off: Sustainability requires consistency. Align with city strategies, secure diverse funding, and plan for year-round relevance.

Measure More Than Money: Track cultural, social, and environmental impact—not just economic gains. Use this insight to refine and improve over time.

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