

# Impact of Gastronomic Events on the Reactivation of MICE Tourism in Bogotá

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**Abstract:** Bogotá is one of the best MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destinations in Latin America due to advantages in air connectivity, financial stability, industries, institutions, hotel infrastructure, and spaces for the development of large events. The city receives more than half of the foreign tourists who visit Colombia, traveling for professional reasons or to participate in congresses and conventions. Likewise, it is characterized by its cultural richness and varied gastronomic offer in products, flavours, preparation techniques, and presentations, with gastronomy being one of the most popular activities for tourists visiting the city for business or events, who take gastronomic tours, visit emblematic cafes and traditional markets. With the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activity in the city decreased by 60%, affecting different sectors. Since the second semester of 2021, the reactivation of massive events and meetings has been promoted, with the reduction of restrictions and the execution of initiatives by public and private entities. Among the initiatives are events that promote the gastronomic sector. This is how the need arises to identify the gastronomic events that take place in Bogotá and describe the impact they have had on the reactivation of MICE tourism during the year 2022. The research is formulated based on a qualitative descriptive methodology, a matrix is built to consolidate the agenda of gastronomic events, the impact on attendees, exhibitors, and sales; Interviews were also conducted with experts who collaborate with public and private entities to create strategies to reactivate the sector. This achieved the identification of a program that includes gastronomic fairs and festivals distributed throughout the year with important figures in sales, attendees, local and foreign exhibitors, demonstrating the impact on the reactivation of the gastronomic sector, which presents itself as an attractive option for the development of the MICE industry in the city.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Economic recovery, Festivals, Food preparation, Traditions, Exhibitions

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## 1. Introduction

MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) is a valued activity with great potential for development worldwide (Soares et al., 2019). According to the governmental agency in charge of promoting Colombian exports, international tourism, and foreign investment in Colombia (PROCOLOMBIA, 2019), event tourists spend an average of US\$472 per day, which exceeds the spending of a leisure tourist. Furthermore, MICE tourism contributes to diversifying tourism demand and regulating seasonality, generating a sustainable long-term model. Colombia is among the 30 countries that hold the most international congresses, occupying the 20th position in the category of "unaffected events," according to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) of 2020.

The meetings industry in Colombia generates an average of US\$2.45 billion annually, representing 22.8% of the total tourism revenue in the country (PROCOLOMBIA, 2019). However, the COVID-19 health crisis has had a significant impact on this industry, with a decrease in event tourism in Bogotá, the city that receives the highest number of foreign visitors in Colombia and is recognized as one of the best destinations in Latin America for the development of business tourism (Forbes, 2022). During 2020, Bogotá experienced a 60% decrease in tourism activities due to the pandemic, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in 2022. Nonetheless, in the second half of 2021, restrictions were lifted, and public and private programs were implemented to promote the recovery of tourism in Bogotá, allowing for the reactivation of mass events and meetings. Among the initiatives developed, gastronomic events stand out, which aim to boost the gastronomic sector in the city. According to the District Institute of Recreation and Tourism (IDT, 2018), the cultural richness and varied gastronomic offer of Bogotá are important attractions for business tourists, as demonstrated by the results of the 2018 Traveller Perception Survey, "Unpacking bleisure: traveller trends," business tourists participate significantly in gastronomic tourism activities such as tours of the city's gastronomic zones, visits to iconic coffee shops, and tours of local markets.

In this context, the present article is organized into five sections. Firstly, an introduction is if sets out the general context of event tourism in the city of Bogotá. In the second section, the concepts of MICE tourism and gastronomic tourism are presented. The third section describes the research methodology used. Next, the fourth section analyses the results obtained. Finally, in the fifth section, the relevant conclusions and discussions are presented, offering final reflections that conclude the article.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

For the purposes of this study, the concepts of MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) and Gastronomic Events, two key areas in the tourism industry, are reviewed and analysed. The existing literature on both topics is examined, highlighting current trends and practices in the holding of gastronomic events and their impact on MICE tourism.

### **2.1 MICE Tourism**

MICE tourism, an acronym for Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions, is a specialized form of tourism considered a valuable tool for post-pandemic recovery (Tham, et al., 2023). Orthodoxou, et al., (2022) note that MICE present an opportunity to diversify a destination's tourism offering, overcome seasonality by extending the tourism season, and attract high-spending visitors, while benefiting local communities. Therefore, it significantly contributes to the economy, image, and development of destinations. It is common for business travellers to extend their stay before or after the event dates, representing almost 40% of the total spending, demonstrating a direct contribution to local revenues (Zazueta, M, and Velarde V., 2022). An increasing number of government entities have recognized the importance of formal policies to promote MICE tourism due to its contribution to the economy, facilitation of new business relationships, urban revitalization, and national identity improvement (Alananzeh, et al., 2019).

### **2.2 Gastronomic Events**

A gastronomic festival refers to 'a festival that highlights the regional/local specialty of food or food-related activities and programs' (Lee & Arcodia, 2012). Festivals create advantages for destinations, bring life to local businesses, encourage the development of new businesses and the emergence of new sources of income. Gastronomic festivals provide a reason for tourists to visit less attractive destinations, thus supporting the tourism and hospitality industries (Durán, 2020). MICE tourism and its relationship with gastronomic events are interconnected with many other sectors of the economy and community-level operations (Rwigema et al., 2020). Additionally, the MICE tourism industry dates back almost three decades, and the growth of MICE tourism is crucial for destinations to remain competitive in the dynamic market of gastronomic events, which has positive benefits for market growth (Enzenbacher, 2020). According to An et al. (2021), in the case of the MICE tourism industry, clients include event organizers, planners, and attendees who identify and evaluate offerings in gastronomic events. However, Rittichainuwa et al. (2020) indicate that this type of tourism helps increase revenue in the gastronomy sector. Nevertheless, there is significant demand for MICE tourism incentive and corporate meetings with an interest in gastronomic events (Rojas et al., 2023).

## **3. Research Methods**

The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach that provided a detailed and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, focusing on the quality of data collected and the interpretation of the social and cultural reality of gastronomic events and their impact on the reactivation of tourism MICE in Bogotá. The study was conducted in Bogotá, Colombia, over a period of four months from August 1 to November 30, 2022.

The data was collected through two main methods: Firstly, an extensive review of local media and official government websites related to tourism and culture in Bogotá was conducted. The scheduled gastronomic events for 2022 in the city were identified and recorded, including information on the date, name, description, and impacts of the events. This review provided objective and verifiable data on the scheduled gastronomic events in the city, giving an overview of the event agenda during the study period. Secondly, systematic interviews were conducted with event organization experts in the city, including an expert in the gastronomic tourism strategy of the Ministry of Tourism of Colombia and a prominent expert in event management from the Pan American Confederation of Schools of Hospitality, Gastronomy, and Tourism (CONPETH). These interviews provided valuable qualitative data on the experts' perception of the impact of gastronomic events on the reactivation of tourism MICE.

Therefore, the proposed methodology employed a mixed methods approach to collect both objective and subjective data on the impact of gastronomic events on tourism MICE reactivation in Bogotá. The use of a descriptive qualitative approach allowed for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the social and cultural reality of these events and their impact on tourism, while the review of official sources provided objective and verifiable data. The systematic interviews with experts further enriched the study by providing qualitative insights into the impact of gastronomic events on tourism MICE, as perceived by those with knowledge and experience in the field.

## 4. Analysis Results

### 4.1 Programming of Gastronomic Events in Bogotá

The schedule of gastronomic events in Bogotá has been a strategy implemented by public and private entities to promote tourism, highlighting the Colombian capital as a gastronomic epicentre in America. These events, mainly fairs and festivals, are held throughout the year with the aim of promoting the culinary culture of the region and attracting tourists interested in gastronomy. In this regard, the present study has conducted a comprehensive review of local media and official government websites related to tourism and culture in Bogotá to identify and record the gastronomic events scheduled for the year 2022 in the city. Table 1 lists the characteristics of the gastronomic festival agenda, indicating their characteristics in terms of the number of attendees, participating establishments, and sales.

**Table 1: Agenda of Gastronomic Festivals in Bogotá in 2022**

<b>Agenda of Gastronomic Festivals in Bogotá in 2022</b>		
<b>Event Name</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Impact on the mice industry</b>
<b>Taco Fest</b>	Focus on Mexican cuisine, with local ingredients, web interaction with consumers, choice of the best taco in town.	Participation of 300 restaurants Sales of \$400 million pesos More than 4,000 attendees
<b>Burgerville</b>	Offer of signature burgers, created for the festival. Event inspired by the 50s and the influence of pop culture, it was held outdoors in an emblematic place of the city with live music and recreational activities. It highlights the use of ingredients that come from Colombian agriculture.	More than 24,000 diners Participation of the sample of 30 gourmet restaurants. Sales of 99,000 plates of food. Employing 634 people.
<b>Burger Master</b>	Gastronomic contest that calls to present a selection of the best artisanal burgers in the country.	2.3 million participants Sales of \$40 billion pesos
<b>Pizza Fest</b>	Pizzerias with artisanal preparations The six winning restaurants of the festival are chosen	Participation of 40 restaurants sales of more than 30,000 attendees raising more than \$ 8,000 million pesos.
<b>Suckling Pig Festival</b>	Festival of the traditional Colombian dish with the aim of repositioning the area in which it is manufactured.	Establishment of 50 gastronomic establishments. 10 thousand dishes sold an approximate of \$ 132 million pesos. Generating \$132 million pesos.
<b>Fritanga fest 2022</b>	Event organized by the Institute of Social Economy (IPES) aimed at supporting the economy of the District Market Places	sales of more than 86 thousand boxes of food. 1,290 million pesos in the 51 restaurants and more than 300 diners participated.

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the review of the events schedule, it is evident that throughout the year there are gastronomic festivals focused on different dishes. In this category, there are events that call for the participation of establishments that innovate with their preparations by making variations of international dishes with local techniques and ingredients. Usually, the duration of the events is 3 to 4 days, and they take place on festive weekends, aiming for greater participation. The festivals have a format in which different establishments located in different parts of the city are called upon to participate. The establishments register for the festival by proposing a dish with differential characteristics with which they make their participation in the event. Tourists and locals could tour the city trying different dishes, following the event guide, and participating in the selection of the best dishes through the festival's social media. Due to the call through social networks, a greater reach has been achieved, replicating the event in different cities in the country, attracting a greater number of participants, and benefiting more establishments.

Another form of gastronomic festival in the city is those held in specific places, offering gastronomic experiences in emblematic spaces of the city, mainly outdoors, and promoting the participation of establishments that offer typical Colombian dishes. This category is driven by governmental organizations focused on promoting the gastronomic heritage of the city. In summary, the gastronomic festivals held in Bogotá during 2022 attracted more than 53,000 attendees, including tourists and locals, representing sales figures of over 50 billion Colombian pesos, benefiting more than 700 gastronomic establishments and sectors related to tourism.

**Table 2: Gastronomic Fairs**

<b>Agenda of gastronomic fairs</b>		
<b>Event Name</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Impact on the mice industry</b>
<b>Alimentec</b>	Event that brought together exhibitors from the food and beverage sectors, traders, chefs, producers, and other players in this sector. A platform for business development, the presentation of new business models, and proposals that seek to position gastronomy as a tourism trend for the city.	Over 25,000 attendees and 300 exhibitors. Business projections for over \$5 million. Attendance of 150 international buyers.
<b>Chocó show</b>	Gastronomic fair that brings together different actors in the Colombian cocoa sector, with international guests, business rounds, and samples of different chocolate-based preparations.	13,000 national and international visitors and 140 exhibitors from different regions of the country.
<b>Bazar de tradition</b>	Bazar de tradition is an event organized by the Institute of Social Economy (IPES), with the participation of the 17 marketplaces in the city.	Participation of 50 gastronomic establishments located in 17 marketplaces. Attendance of more than 23,000 diners.
<b>Expo vinos</b>	The 17th version of the event was held with reach across Latin America, bringing together experts, winemakers, and sommeliers from different parts of the country and the world in an academic space of talks and conferences on knowledge, training, and business.	28,000 attendees, 100 national and international guests who participated in more than 60 conferences, 14 blind tastings to choose the best wines of the fair, gastronomic shows, 170 live musicians, and a store with more than 800 wine references.
<b>Café de Colombia Expo</b>	It is the most important specialty coffee fair in Latin America. It integrates the entire coffee value chain and offers a platform to showcase market trends and innovations at a national and international level. It has academic, commercial, and cultural spaces.	20,300 attendees, participation of 110 exhibitors, attendance of 26 international buyers who generated a projection of USD 3.4 million.
<b>Bogotá Madrid fusion</b>	The event brings together national and international chefs in presentations and Master Workshops for the interested public. It integrates business rounds and a commercial fair in a Gastronomic Entrepreneurship Hall supporting new gastronomic ventures.	1,400 attendees, participation of 220 entrepreneurs from the gastronomic sector, 40 international chefs invited.

Source: Own elaboration

Gastronomic fairs are events that mostly take place at the Bogotá International Business and Exhibition Center - Corferias. Events such as Bazar de la Tradicion, Alimentec, Expo Vinos, Cafés de Colombia, Choco Show and Bogotá Madrid Fusion have brought together more than 100,000 attendees and over 600 national and international exhibitors, showing new business models, innovations, and gastronomic trends. These events offer academic, commercial, and cultural spaces, with the participation of experts in traditional cuisine, international gastronomy, and the food and beverage subsector value chain, providing a platform for knowledge and experience exchange in the gastronomic industry. These events are called by federations or associations of productive sectors, with the aim of promoting the country's products and allowing the closing of business deals with international clients. They are events that support the food and beverage sector and showing the gastronomic richness of Colombia at an international level, reflecting its impact on the reactivation of the sector.

#### **4.2 Perception of Experts on Gastronomic Events**

The perception of the interviewed experts regarding the impact of gastronomic events on the reactivation of tourism in the city of Bogotá is very favourable. They indicate that the organization of gastronomic events allows showing the city's gastronomic richness, laying the foundation for creating gastronomic tourism routes and accounting for many attendees representing a population interested in gastronomy as the main attraction of the activities. Similarly, they indicate that the city's gastronomic richness, location, and infrastructure, as well as the presence of all economic sectors, promoters, and exponents of gastronomy working in the city, are elements that favor the organization of gastronomic events in Bogotá. These activities benefit establishments, promote the generation of new jobs in the tourism sector and other related sectors such as those responsible for coordination, entertainment, and agriculture in the region. Finally, they indicate that the integration of ICT is the main communication element that allows participation in events from anywhere in the world by integrating strategies on social networks that increase the participation of attendees and exhibitors.

### **5. Conclusions and Discussions**

From reviewing the city's event schedule, it can be determined that there is a specific focus on gastronomy, and in 2022, new proposals emerged with the goal of promoting the city's economic reactivation. These proposals promote the participation of many gastronomic establishments and exhibitors, regardless of their location, while also promoting tours of different iconic places in the city. This can be seen in the case of festivals promoted by private organizers through social media, which manage to attract many national and international attendees. These initiatives are of great relevance in the reactivation of MICE tourism. Given that activities related to gastronomy are the most popular among tourists who travel to the city for meetings and business, gastronomic events would help boost the city as an attractive destination for the development of MICE tourism. Additionally, the interest of private and public entities in promoting the city's typical gastronomy is identified, as well as proposals and adaptations of international dishes with innovations that involve ancestral preparation techniques and ingredients that are products of Colombian agriculture. Thus, the impact extends not only to tourism but to the entire chain that makes these activities possible in the city.

This research is limited to the review of gastronomic events in the city of Bogotá during the year 2022, based on the consultation of the events agenda published in media and cultural promotion entities in the city, as well as the perception of experts in promoting the city's gastronomy. However, it is proposed to expand its scope to review the correlation between tourist attendance at these activities and attendance at MICE events in Bogotá within a certain period, as well as to apply instruments to understand the perception of tourists who participate in these activities. This will allow a thorough understanding of the real impact on tourism service providers and identify the trends that the development of gastronomic events in the city may be creating and how they influence the decision to choose the city as a MICE destination.

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