Introduction

For some years now Girona province has placed itself as the centre of international prestige in the field of cuisine, with chefs such as Ferran Adrià and the Roca brothers positioning it in the world of haute cuisine. This is no sheer coincidence, but the result of a confluence of many factors (also related to the local people’s way of life and understanding of food) that make this region a privileged destination. Catalonia in general and, more specifically Girona, enjoy a long culinary tradition that can be documented back to the Middle Ages (there are clear references to it from many authors and recipes dating from this period). In addition, the province of Girona extends from the sea to the mountains, providing a variety of fresh and seasonal products throughout the year. This gives rise to various quality certifications and many typical local products, while favouring the holding of different events related to local products and cuisine. In 2012, the World Tourism Organisation compiled a global report on food tourism. This report highlights the considerable growth of this tourism sector and its relationship with the territory, culture, authenticity and local products.

The results of this close relationship within the territory are numerous initiatives at the local and national level, which aim to add further value to the industry. In respect of this, for example, we find actions implemented by the Catalan Tourism Agency and the Costa Brava Tourist Board aimed at promoting this type of niche tourism. In the Catalan sphere, moreover, we must not forget other bodies such as the Catalan Academy of Gastronomy (Acadèmia Catalana de Gastronomia) and the Alicia Foundation. The former has as its objective to research, disseminate and promote Catalan cuisine. The latter, led by Ferran Adrià,
promotes improved eating habits, awarding value to food heritage and technological innovation in cuisine. Nor can we fail to mention the new Chair of Gastronomy, Culture and Tourism, established as a joint collaboration between the University of Girona and Calonge Town Council to promote and position the Girona region as a reference in the field.

Culinary tourism through selected events can bring significant benefits to regions where it is introduced, benefitting small farmers and food artisans and recovering (or preventing the loss of) not only ancient crafts and traditions, but also recipes and products. In this chapter we aim to analyse the fairs, markets and culinary campaigns organised in the province. To this end, we must first briefly conceptualise the area of study, both culinary tourism and event organisation, before moving on to be concrete about events held in the province of Girona in relation to food.

Culinary tourism and events

Tourism is both multidisciplinary and changing. Greg Richards, in a study on the profile of cultural tourists in 2002, stated that cultural tourists are changing their profile and increasingly demanding experiences and knowledge of local culture in the places they visit beyond more than just their architectural, monumental and/or museum heritage. Modern-day visitors feel the need to appreciate the atmosphere of a place, enjoy the local food, get to know the customs and participate in a particular event. In line with this greater enjoyment of other senses we find the emergence of wine, olive oil and culinary tourism (López Guzman & Sánchez Cañizares, 2012). Cuisine as a tourism resource is valued for its adaptation to new trends in cultural consumption: it allows the culture to be approached in a more experiential and participative, rather than strictly contemplative, manner (Grande, 2001). Blakey (2011) adds that culinary tourism endows a region with authenticity and distinction, which is increasingly important if we take into account homogenisation, or as she refers to it in the culinary sense, ‘McDonaldization’.

We therefore believe that culinary tourism is based on discovering and learning, eating and tasting, as well as enjoying the culinary culture identified with a territory, which comprises a complete sensory experience, as visitors can experience the pleasure of taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing. Through food, tourists experience a greater connection with the environment they are visiting, far from the aforementioned role of spectator.

According to Tresserras, Medina and Matamala (2007), cuisine unites two values sought by modern-day tourists. On the one hand, that ‘local’