

Article

Food-Related Behaviours of Female and Male Tourists before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The literature contains scant information on the relationship between tourists' gender and their attitudes toward food while vacationing. The present study had as its main aim to examine the role of gender in key behaviours concerning tourists' food choices and eating habits; in addition, our study evaluated the hypothesis that gender interacts with the "pandemic effect" in modifying tourists' food-related behaviour. By implementing a quantitative, exploratory, and descriptive methodology, an online questionnaire was developed based on existing literature. To this end, data derived from 474 female and 370 male tourists visiting Greece in 2019 (before) or in 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic) were analysed and evaluated. The results indicate that, compared to men, women were more motivated to taste local food, especially with respect to obtaining cultural experience and excitement, promoting interpersonal relations, and as a result of health concerns. In addition, they dined at facilities at their place of stay, as well as at Greek restaurants and taverns at a higher rate compared to men. Women also reported being more satisfied than men by their food experiences during their trips, and was found that during the pandemic they spent, on average, more on food than before. The study showed that the pandemic affected both genders; however, the most significant of the differences observed relates to the choice of dining facilities, in all likelihood, as a result of women being more sensitive to the risks of COVID-19. Overall, during the pandemic, women appeared more likely than men to adopt behaviours that are in line with the principles of sustainability, such as a positive attitude and motivation to consume foods produced locally in the country. Differences detected between genders can be used by various stakeholders as a benchmark to further improve the food services offered at tourist destinations.

Keywords: gender; tourist; food behaviour; COVID-19 pandemic; Greece



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1. Introduction

Gender has been shown to have a significant impact on eating behaviour, food choices, and consumption [1–5]. Differences between females and males in food-related behaviours are conditioned by evolutionary, biological, psychological, geophysical and social factors [1,2]. In Western society, the ideal body weight is perceived to be much lower for women than for men. Women, more frequently than men, have an ambivalent relationship with food and give greater importance to healthy eating and to the achievement of an ideal body weight [4]. Women are also characterized by a greater nutritional awareness and knowledge compared to men [3,5]. Women's relationship to food is complex, as a result of the social pressure they experience to maintain a desirable body shape; however, at the same time, they appear to have a greater tendency to dine in groups as compared to men [2]. In contrast, men's approach to nutrition is less complicated and more pleasure-oriented [3]; men are attracted by fat-rich meals and dine at fast food outlets more frequently than women [2].

Food provides much more than sustenance; it is an integral part of culture, a significant component of the global intangible heritage and an increasingly important tourist attraction [6]. Food tourism as a niche market is essential in enhancing destinations and connecting visitors' experiences to the culinary culture of a place [7–9]. Food is a way to connect the traditions and the history of a place [10]. Local cuisine can contribute to memorable experiences and enhance tourists' integration into local communities [11,12]. Visitors' expenditure on food constitutes a significant part of people's income in touristic destinations [13]; in Greece, for instance, food and beverages consumed by tourists represent 25% of the total tourism annual revenue [14]. Thus, connecting food to tourism provides an opportunity for local economic growth, which can be bolstered by the use of gastronomic experiences targeted to destination branding and marketing [15]. The literature suggests that tourists' food consumption is shaped by a number of socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, marital status, social status, nationality, educational level, occupation, and income [16–19]. Nevertheless, in general, researchers do not stratify their study samples according to socio-demographic characteristics, due to the lack of prior studies that would support this procedure. Even in those cases where study samples are classified by gender, the analysis and interpretation of the results are narrow, and findings are often contradictory.

As a situation that humanity experienced for the first time in recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that lack of knowledge restricts the ability to manage risks and unpredictability, and revealed the need to comprehend tourism in the social, political, and economic contexts that will shape the future world [20,21]. Sixty-three per cent of World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) experts believe that the tourism industry will not fully recover before 2024 [22]. The pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism dynamics, resulting in changes in travellers' behaviour that require swift, innovative responses [23–25].

While numerous studies in various settings have confirmed the role of personal characteristics on purchasing behaviours, studies on the role of gender in the decision-making process of tourists are scarce. Academia could assist the food tourism industry in reorienting and adapting itself to the new circumstances by examining how the pandemic affected tourists' consumer behaviour [26–28]. In addition, exploring the food-related behaviour of female and male tourists can provide the theoretical and practical framework in order to gain an understanding of the differences between men and women and develop gender-oriented products and services to address future challenges.

The present study had two main objectives. First, it aimed at comparing the food consumption behaviour of female and male tourists. To this end, we examined selected key features of tourists' food-related behaviour [29], namely the attitudes and motivations toward food as well as the degree of satisfaction in the foods consumed and the dining facilities visited during trips in Greece. Second, it aimed at examining whether a global health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, affects women's and men's food behaviour in different ways while vacationing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender and Food Choices While Vacationing

Type of activities, lifestyle, personality, motivations, and cultural values are factors thought to contribute to the behavioural differences observed between male and female tourists [30]. With respect to food choices, research in this area is equivocal, as some studies concluded that gender explains variations in tourists' food consumption and influences to some degree preferences towards local food [16–18,31–36], while others failed to show these relationships [37–39].

The empirical verification of Kim et al.'s [16] model in a British population showed that males were mostly motivated by cultural experience and females by interpersonal relationships when tasting local food while on vacation [17]. Similarly, Campbell [40] reports that male tourists are interested in exploring different or special cultures, and

Zhang et al. [41] suggest that females' travel motivations are influenced by their friends or family members. On the other hand, according to Kivela and Crofts [31], men are more interested in consuming local food due to their emphasis on taste. Women remain concerned about the safety of food [16–42], their weight status, and avoiding meat consumption and high-calorie foods [43], even while on holidays.

Wądołowska et al. [36] investigated the relationship between demographic variables, food preferences, and food choices in a Polish population. Their research showed that women are more inclined to gain nutritional knowledge about health problems and a healthy diet. For instance, the majority of female respondents highlighted the importance of seeking novel healthy products and taking care of their health. Sengel et al. [33] showed that gender is associated with differences concerning the interest of tourists in local delicacies when visiting the Old City district of Istanbul. Female tourists tended to be more interested in trying unfamiliar foods, probably because food arrangements in traditional families are typically viewed as the responsibility of female housekeepers. The researchers point out that it is not surprising that women are more likely to taste unfamiliar foods instead of the familiar foods they usually cook at home. Due to having a more cautious nature, female tourists are more interested in collecting information about food options at a destination. Males are more loyal to destinations where they have tried local cuisine, and they tend to return solely to taste it once again. They taste local cuisine as a means of escaping the daily routine, likely because they are in search of food variety and may not have the opportunity to do so in their daily lives. Tomassini et al. [35] investigated visitors' motivations for tasting local dishes in restaurants in the Netherlands. Women were more likely to choose local food as part of their habits and daily routines. Practice theory helps to conceptualize such routines as interdependent [44] and as rooted in background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, emotional states, and motivational knowledge [45].

Gender differences with respect to neophilia and neophobia can also be relevant when considering visitors' food choices. Male tourists from China were found to be more neophilic toward food compared to their female counterparts, a finding that suggests that women from China, unlike their western counterparts, may be less receptive to new experiences, extraversion, and cognition [32]. Similarly, when examining the motivations of tourists from India, a medium-income country, Indian men demonstrated both food-neophilic and food-neophobic behaviours more frequently than women [34]. In general, in societies where conservative societal values prevail, men seem to favour more than women the consumption of unusual foods as an "adventurous" component of travel, social events, and dining-out experiences [32]. On the contrary, studies conducted in Finland [46] and Sweden [47], indicate that women are more neophilic than men. Last, Olabi et al. [48] and Zhao et al. [49] did not find differences in food neophobia between men and women regarding Lebanese, American and Chinese samples.

On the other hand, the literature suggests that tourists' attitudes with respect to local cuisine experiences at a destination are not dependent on gender. More specifically, a study investigating six restaurants in three midsized cities in the Southeastern United States indicated that gender does not influence the attitudes and motivations of tourists to consume local cuisine [39]. In the same line, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [37] showed that female and male visitors at an annual fair in Helsinki demonstrated similar food motivations toward local food. Lastly, both male and female Slow Food members engage in food-related activities such as tasting local food, purchasing from small-scale producers, reading restaurant menus, participating in local culinary events, and attending cooking classes when possible [38]. These findings are in line with the previous interpretations of the pull effect of food experiences on destination choice and the casual attitude toward food experiences on-site [37].

According to the literature review, the hypotheses to be verified are as follows:

Hypothesis H1. *Gender plays a role in tourists' choices of dining facilities.*

Hypothesis H2. *Gender plays a role in tourists' attitudes toward food.*

Hypothesis H3. *Gender plays a role in tourists' motivations concerning the consumption of local food.*

Hypothesis H4. *Gender plays a role in tourists' food-related personality traits.*

Hypothesis H5. *Gender plays a role in tourists' level of satisfaction with food.*

2.2. *The Pandemic's Effect on Food Choices According to Tourists' Gender*

Lazaridis et al. [50] showed that the attitudes of tourists visiting Greece towards food were more positive during the pandemic than the year before; this finding was found to be associated with an increased motivation to experience local food. Tourists who travelled during the pandemic were found to be more knowledgeable and more interested in food and cuisine; they also spent more money on food and were eager to taste Greek food in traditional Greek restaurants [50]. Despite the fact that the pandemic crisis changed tourism landscapes and tourists' typologies and preferences [51], food remained an essential motivational factor in destination choices [52]. This provided an opportunity for tourism stakeholders to regain consumer confidence by reducing perceived risks and increasing the perceived value associated with these barriers [53]. The pandemic has changed the way people go on holiday, as the severity, vulnerability and threat evaluation play a crucial role in tourists' decision making [54]. Even though both genders faced the same obstacles, female travellers perceived COVID-19 as more severe and expressed willingness to adopt a preventive strategy [55]. Notwithstanding the fact that the pandemic caused emotional difficulties for people worldwide, tourism was seen as an effective means of relieving stress and rejuvenating life [54].

In accordance with the social role theory [56] and the evolutionary psychology paradigm, consumption-related behaviour is gender-related [57]. Specifically, men are more willing to take risks than women; such behaviour has given them a competitive advantage in the process of natural selection [58]. Male and female individuals play different roles and exhibit dissimilar behaviours in society because they are differently socialised. In particular, the early socialisation of females tends to be passive and restrained, whereas the socialisation of males tends to make them more proactive and independent [56]. Ryu and Han [59] investigated New Orleans as one of the top destinations for culinary tourism in the United States. Despite the fact that Hurricane Katrina in 2005 severely affected the city's image, it remains famous for its food, music, culture, events, and festivals among both domestic and international visitors. Tourists' gender was found to play a significant moderating role in the relationships between attitude, past behaviour, and behavioural intention to experience the local cuisine. Participants of both genders were willing to experience local cuisine, but for different reasons. Male tourists tasted local food because of the interaction between attitude and behavioural intention. Female tourists tasted local food once they had a positive prior experience, highlighting the interaction of past behaviour and behavioural intentions. Homburg and Giering [60] found that female customers are more likely to purchase a product repeatedly if pleased by their overall past experience. As a way to make their trip more enjoyable, they would rather consume good local food they already know.

A study that investigated how Polish tourists reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that their travel preferences were independent of gender; however, women were eager to look for local food on holidays [61]. Female respondents often looked for discounts and promotions for well-known brands, shopped second hand, and shared unnecessary items. They also paid more attention to and appreciated the quality of the geographical origin of food and emphasised the importance of traditional, non-genetically modified foods [61]. In another study investigating the experiences of Poles travelling for leisure purposes in the summer season of 2020, the rating given by women in the case of catering services provided in chain cafeterias was higher than that of men [62]. Fast food outlets,

restaurants and other food service facilities did not show significant differences. The most frequent change was the avoidance of overcrowded places, a typical post-COVID lockdown behaviour [24,50].

While the effect of risk perception on attitude is the same for both genders, females seem to be more likely to favour less popular destinations than males [63]. This could be explained by the fact that perceived travel risk is gender-specific [64,65]; for instance, the BBC has reported that Asian tourists, particularly working mothers, were subjected to higher emotional distress and depression as a result of being overburdened with family caretaking duties due at home [63]. In addition, according to Bae and Chang [63], the crisis has aggravated gender inequality. Consequently, it is plausible that women perceive risks more gravely than men [63,64,66].

According to the analysis of the literature, the hypotheses to be tested are as follows:

Hypothesis H6. *Gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' choices of dining facilities.*

Hypothesis H7. *Gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' attitudes toward food.*

Hypothesis H8. *Gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' motivations concerning the consumption of local food.*

Hypothesis H9. *Gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' food-related personality traits.*

Hypothesis H10. *Gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' level of satisfaction with food.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Survey Instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature and was structured into three basic sections. The first section included information on participants' sociodemographic characteristics through multiple-choice, dichotomous-type, and open-ended questions. The second section assessed the travel characteristics of the participants using similar question formats. In addition, it measured the level of tourist participation in activities and the type of dining facilities used. The participants were asked to indicate their answers using a Likert-type scale, from 1 (never, not at all, or strongly disagree) to 5 (usually, or strongly agree). The third section evaluated food attitudes, motivations, and satisfaction using a Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A combination of the food-attitude models proposed by Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [67] and Pérez-Priego et al. [9] was implemented. These models classify tourists by considering their predisposition, interest, and knowledge of local food and gastronomy. The food motivational dimensions, namely cultural experience, sensory appeal, excitement, interpersonal relations, consideration for health concerns, and food personality traits, were investigated through the models of Kim et al. [17] and Madaleno et al. [18]. Questions investigating food satisfaction determined the appreciation of food services and products and the likelihood of consuming these products again at the same destination and recommending them to friends or relatives [18] (Figure 1).

The survey instrument was posted in three different languages (Greek, English, and French). It was initially translated from Greek to English, forward and backwards, twice. The same back-translation method was used to translate the questionnaire from Greek to French. Before the questionnaire was distributed, its content was refined by two academic experts and two tourism professionals. It was also pre-tested on a convenience sample of 40 tourists to ensure the quality of the collected data and eliminate any ambiguous,

vague, or unfamiliar terms. The pre-test allowed for additional minor improvements to be made based on participants' comments. During the pilot phase, it was detected that a few questions were not clearly understood by respondents, and these were revised. This step was important to make sure that the wording, measurement scales, and order of the questions were easy for the participants to understand and suitable for this survey.

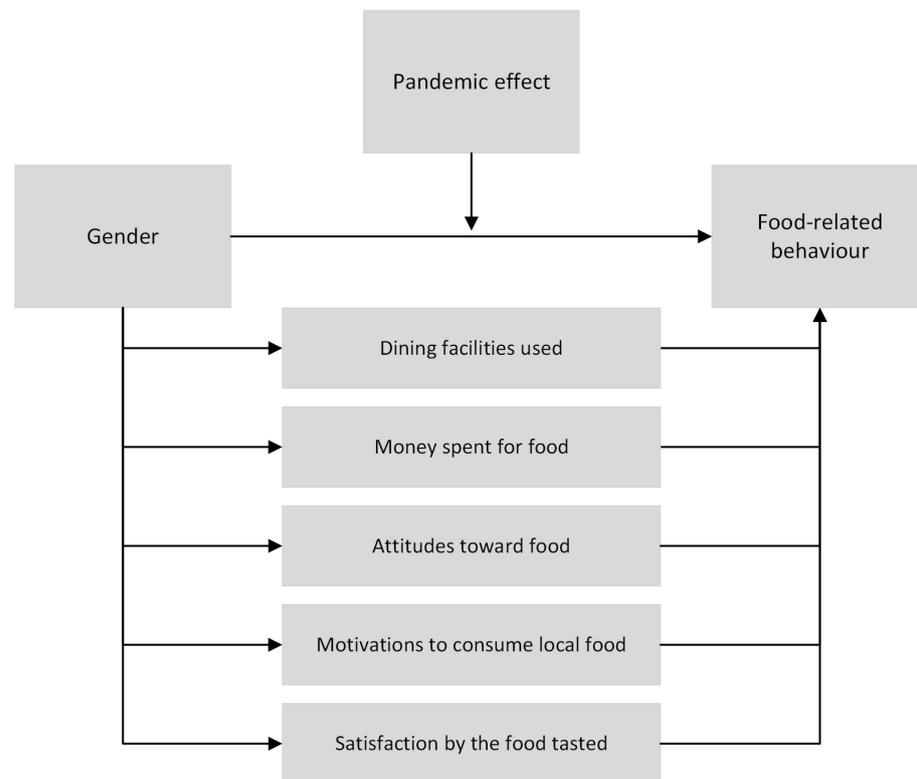


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study [9,17,18,50,67].

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

This was a quantitative, cross-sectional, exploratory, and descriptive study, as data from many different tourists at a single point in time were collected to accurately and systematically describe the population of people visiting Greece and investigate research questions that have not previously been studied in depth. In regards to the comparison of the periods before and during the pandemic, this was also a trend study, as sampling included different groups of tourists at different points in time from the same population. A self-administered online structured questionnaire was created on Google Forms and linked to Facebook. A message inviting participation in the survey was posted to multiple pages and groups related to tourists visiting Greece. To rely on a representative sample, more than 130 Facebook pages related to Greek tourism and destinations with over one million members were contacted. In terms of demographics, psychometrics, and personality attributes, Facebook-administered surveys do not exhibit significant bias in comparison to conventionally administered surveys. Using Facebook as a data collection tool for surveys provides a unique digital observatory of human behaviour and great opportunities for conducting large-scale surveys [68]. In addition, it offers the ability to collect data quickly and inexpensively in response to research potential and to conduct research even when sampling frames do not exist or are extremely difficult to access [69].

The survey was conducted between July and October 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) and between July and October 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). To collect the data, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was employed. This is a common method in tourism research; the respondents are individuals available at a specific place and time [70]. To reduce social desirability bias, all participants were assured of their

anonymity and informed that participation was voluntary. In addition, they completed the questionnaires without receiving any reward and were fully informed of the requirements of the study, confidentiality, and individual policy. Before starting, they consented to data sharing. Completion of the questionnaire lasted approximately 15 min.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were evaluated using frequency distributions and descriptive statistics, and the results were presented as valid per cent, mean value (M), and standard deviation (SD). A Pearson's chi-square test was conducted to further interpret tourists' sociodemographic and travel characteristics differences between the two genders. Regarding food attitudes, motivations, and satisfaction, a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.70 was deemed acceptable for evaluating each factor's internal consistency and reliability [71]. The scale and subscale scores were calculated by averaging the associated items.

A normality test was performed on the data before undergoing any other statistical analysis. Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests revealed that the scale and subscale scores could not support the normality assumption. For this reason, nonparametric tests (Mann–Whitney U) were used to compare male and female participants' scores on tourist activities, dining facilities used, food attitudes, food motivations, and satisfaction before and during the pandemic. This test is frequently used as an alternative to the paired Student's t-test when the assumption of normality is violated. In addition, nonparametric statistical methods outperform parametric methods for Likert scale data [72].

Ordinal logistic or linear regression was conducted to investigate the associations of factors by taking into consideration participants' gender. The strength of the statistical association between two variables is presented in the form of odds ratios (OR) or standardised coefficients (β) and a corresponding 95% (lower-higher) confidence interval (CI). The Brant test [73] was used for the proportionality assumption. Statistical significance was determined using two-sided tests and p-values less than 0.05. All calculations were conducted using R software (version 4.1.3, R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria), which is an open-source programming language and environment for statistical computing and graphics [74].

4. Results

Data were derived from a sample of tourists who visited Greece in any one of the two tourist seasons in 2019 or 2020. A total of 877 questionnaires were turned in. After identifying missing data, unengaged responses, and extreme multivariate outliers, 844 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. The rate of rejection of the questionnaire was low and not significantly dependent on any variable. It is worth mentioning that three respondents did not wish to indicate their gender and were excluded from further analysis. In addition, more female (N = 474, or 56.2%) than male (N = 370, or 43.8%) tourists participated in the study. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

4.1. Tourists' Profiles

Participants' socio-demographic characteristics and their distribution are presented in Table 1. Male respondents were younger (i.e., less than 40 years old) than female respondents (71.9% vs. 66.6%). More Greek female tourists participated in the survey than Greek male tourists (38.2% vs. 22.4%). The proportions of European (except for Greek) tourists participating in the study were similar; however, the proportion of tourists coming from other continents (i.e., America, Asia, Oceania, and Africa) differed between men and women (22.4% vs. 7.8%). Proportionally, more male than female respondents reported a single marital status (60.3% vs. 49.9%). With respect to other socio-demographic factors, i.e., level of education, occupation, or financial status, no differences emerged between men and women ($p > 0.05$).

Table 1. Distribution of tourists' socio-demographic profile in terms of gender.

Variables	Categories	Gender		Chi-Squared Tests <i>p</i> -Value
		Male N = 370	Female N = 474	
Age Group	18–30 years old	34.6	31.5	0.022
	31–40 years old	37.3	35.1	
	41–50 years old	14.1	22.8	
	51–60 years old	10.5	8.0	
	>60 years of age	3.5	2.5	
Nationality	Greek	22.4	38.2	0.000
	European (except Greek)	55.1	54.0	
	Other	22.4	7.8	
Education	Secondary education	14.7	12.9	0.204
	Vocational training	4.4	3.0	
	Diploma/Bachelor degree	36.8	32.1	
	Master's degree	36.2	41.4	
	PhD	7.9	10.6	
Occupation	Student	15.8	16.9	0.065
	Civil servant	12.8	20.1	
	Private employee	42.0	35.3	
	Freelancer	18.8	17.1	
	Unemployed	3.5	4.7	
	Other	7.1	6.0	
Marital Status	Married	15.9	14.9	0.002
	Married with child/children	20.5	28.0	
	Never Married	60.3	49.9	
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	3.3	7.2	
Financial Status	Not good	4.4	3.9	0.593
	Slightly good	20.9	22.5	
	Good	53.8	53.7	
	Very good	18.4	18.8	
	Excellent	2.5	1.1	

Note: N = 844. Numbers in columns of gender present valid percentages.

As presented in Table 2, more male tourists participated in the survey before the pandemic (55.4%, N = 205) than during the pandemic (44.6%, N = 165), while an inverse distribution was noted for female tourists, as fewer of them participated in the survey before (47.3%, N = 224) than during the pandemic (52.7%, N = 250). Female respondents visited one of the Greek urban centres at a lower rate compared to their male counterparts (15.9% vs. 29.2%) but visited islands at a higher rate (54.4% vs. 41.9%). Both the percentages of participants travelling as a tour group member and their length of stay were similar between the two genders. Female respondents visited familiar destinations at a higher rate than male respondents (47.6% vs. 37.8%). Moreover, more women selected to stay in a hotel rated with two or more stars compared to men (41.6% vs. 33.9%). Lastly, male respondents reported travelling alone at a higher rate than their female counterparts (24.7% vs. 13.8%).

No gender-related differences were found with respect to participants' engagement in various activities while staying in Greece (entertainment, nightlife, sightseeing, culinary, etc.), except for women's inclination to enjoy rest at a higher rate compared to men ($M = 3.39 > 3.21$ and $p = 0.018$) (Table 3). In addition, the percentage of money spent on food by men and women was similar.

Table 2. The distribution of travel characteristics according to gender.

Variables	Categories	Gender		Chi-Squared Tests
		Male N = 370	Female N = 474	p-Value
Travel period	Before COVID-19	55.4	47.3	0.019
	During COVID-19	44.6	52.7	
Place of visit	Big cities (Athens, Salonica, Patras)	29.2	15.9	0.000
	Islands	41.9	54.4	
	Villages, touristic resorts (mainland)	18.9	19.7	
	Other	10.0	10.0	
Length of stay	<4 nights	9.9	8.3	0.891
	4–7 nights	52.7	54.1	
	8–15 nights	29.4	29.5	
	>15 nights	8.0	8.1	
Previous visits to the destination	No, this was the 1st time	62.2	52.4	0.007
	Yes, this was the 2nd time	13.3	20.3	
	Yes, I have been to that destination more than twice in the past	24.5	27.3	
Place of stay in the destination	4–5 star hotel	13.0	17.1	0.011
	2–3 star hotel	20.9	24.5	
	1-star hotel/Hostel/Pension	11.7	5.9	
	Family or friends' house	12.7	15.2	
	Airbnb or rooms to rent	30.4	26.4	
	Camping	8.4	6.1	
	Other	3.0	4.7	
Travel companion	Alone	24.7	13.8	0.000
	Couple	36.6	42.4	
	Family (with kids)	11.9	17.0	
	Friends/relatives	26.9	26.9	
Travel as a tour group member	Yes	1.9	3.8	0.109
	No	98.1	96.2	

Note: N = 844. Numbers in columns of gender present valid percentages.

Table 3. Tourists' activity profile and money spent on food.

Variables	Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test
	Male		Female		p-Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Resting	3.21	1.094	3.39	1.048	0.018
Entertainment, nightlife	2.45	1.294	2.32	1.192	0.244
Sightseeing, museums, and monuments	2.85	1.241	2.79	1.162	0.436
Food, culinary, and tasting activities	3.11	1.174	3.21	1.136	0.224
Adventure, alternative activities	2.50	1.192	2.34	1.147	0.054
Percentage (%) of money for food	34.88	17.23	36.02	21.34	0.754

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant.

4.2. Dining Facilities Used during Trip

Types of dining facilities used by men and women during their trip to Greece are shown in Table 4. Women frequented the facilities of their accommodation ($M = 2.61 > 2.36$ and $p = 0.003$) as well as Greek restaurants and taverns ($M = 3.39 > 3.16$ and $p = 0.004$) at a higher rate compared to men, while men more often visited fast food and street food outlets ($M = 2.51 > 2.24$ and $p = 0.001$). This observation was confirmed by the results of the regression analysis: female respondents were 53% “more likely” (i.e., usually or frequently vs. never) to dine at their place of stay than male respondents. Similarly, female

respondents were 46% more likely than male respondents to dine in Greek restaurants and taverns; in contrast, the likelihood of women selecting fast food and street food outlets was lower by 39%. In conclusion, the results partially allow confirming hypothesis 1: gender is associated with tourists’ choice of dining facilities.

Table 4. Types of dining facilities used by tourists.

Variables	Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test	Ordinal Logistic Regression	
	Male		Female			p-Value	OR
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Dining facilities (e.g., hotel restaurant) at the place of stay	2.36	1.101	2.61	1.207	0.003	1.53 *	[1.18, 1.99]
Own preparation of meals at the place of stay	2.32	1.188	2.36	1.210	0.624	1.16	[0.89, 1.52]
Greek restaurants, tavernas	3.16	1.182	3.39	1.194	0.004	1.46 *	[1.13, 1.89]
Fast food, street food (e.g., pita gyros, souvlaki, canteens)	2.51	1.228	2.24	1.116	0.001	0.61 **	[0.46, 0.81]
Restaurants serving international cuisine	1.48	0.748	1.44	0.743	0.237	0.94	[0.54, 1.64]
Snack bars, coffee houses, beach bars	2.59	1.156	2.58	1.115	0.982	0.94	[0.72, 1.23]

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Ordinal logistic regression outcome: gender. Category: female. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Attitudes toward Food

Mean values of men’s and women’s responses in five particular elements related to the role that food plays in their general attitudes when travelling are shown in Table 5. Overall, women were found to be positively predisposed toward food at a higher rate compared to men ($M = 3.69 > 3.48$ and $p = 0.004$). The regression analysis confirmed the above finding, as women’s overall score was higher by 0.26 points on a five-point Likert scale compared to men’s. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the final food attitude scale is 0.878, indicating a high degree of internal consistency among the five scale elements. In conclusion, the results allow confirming hypothesis 2: gender plays a significant role in tourists’ attitudes toward food.

Table 5. Men and women’s attitudes toward food.

Variables	Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test	Ordinal Logistic Regression		Linear Regression	
	Male		Female			p-Value	OR	95% CI	β
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
Food and eating are important motives for travelling	3.43	1.045	3.49	1.002	0.571	1.03	[0.79, 1.33]		
Food and eating experiences are important when choosing a destination	3.22	1.093	3.28	1.027	0.580	1.03	[0.80, 1.33]		
Food and eating are important for travel satisfaction	3.97	0.916	4.05	0.863	0.214	1.20	[0.87, 1.67]		
I am interested in food and cuisine in general	3.56	0.989	3.91	0.827	0.000	2.02 ***	[1.51, 2.70]		
I have good knowledge of food and cuisine in general	3.21	0.985	3.68	0.844	0.000	2.44 ***	[1.87, 3.18]		
ATTITUDE TOWARD FOOD Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.878	3.48	0.854	3.69	0.727	0.004			0.26 **	[0.15, 0.36]

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Variables in capitals are constructed in order to evaluate tourists’ responses. Ordinal and Linear logistic regression outcome: gender. Category: female. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4. Motivations to Consume Local Food Products

Tourists’ motivations toward consumption of local food are presented in Table 6. Compared to male respondents, female respondents declared being motivated to eat local food products in order to gain cultural experience ($M = 4.21 > 3.99$ and $p = 0.007$), excitement ($M = 3.78 > 3.66$ and $p = 0.040$), interpersonal relations ($M = 3.83 > 3.54$ and $p < 0.001$), as well as because of health concerns ($M = 3.72 > 3.52$ and $p = 0.001$) at a higher rate. However, men and women showed similar trends with respect to the role of sensory appeal ($p = 0.057$) or food neophilia ($p = 0.883$) in their consumption behaviour. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient values for all subscales are greater than 0.7, indicating good internal consistency among the scale components. However, food neophilia has a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient just below 0.7, indicating marginal internal consistency. The regression analysis confirmed that female respondents demonstrated a higher tendency to be driven by cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relations, and health concerns, as women’s overall score was higher by 0.22, 0.12, 0.29, and 0.20 points on a five-point Likert scale, respectively, compared to men’s. In conclusion, the results partially allow us to confirm hypothesis 3: gender plays a significant role in tourists’ cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal and health motivations concerning the consumption of local food. On the other hand, hypothesis 4 is not accepted: gender does not play a significant role in tourists’ food-related personality traits.

Table 6. Men and women’s motivations to consume local food during travel.

Variables	Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test <i>p</i> -Value	Ordinal Logistic Regression		Linear Regression	
	Male		Female			OR	95% CI	β	95% CI
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
Experiencing local products increases my knowledge about different cultures	3.98	0.986	4.18	0.729	0.019	2.23 **	[1.56, 3.18]		
Tasting local products in an original place is an authentic experience	4.01	1.003	4.25	0.756	0.003	2.08 **	[1.45, 2.99]		
CULTURAL EXPERIENCE Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.898	3.99	0.95	4.21	0.704	0.007			0.22 **	[0.11, 0.33]
It is important to me that the local products I eat on holiday look nice and taste good	4.35	0.725	4.45	0.653	0.057	1.89 *	[1.10, 3.27]		
SENSORY APPEAL	4.35	0.725	4.450	0.653	0.057			0.10	[0.01, 0.19]
Experiencing local products in their original place excites me	3.74	0.931	3.90	0.782	0.013	1.67 *	[1.25, 2.23]		
Tasting local products on holiday helps me to relax	3.59	0.864	3.66	0.799	0.199	1.32	[1.01, 1.73]		
EXCITEMENT Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.745	3.66	0.811	3.78	0.697	0.040			0.12 *	[0.01, 0.22]
Tasting local products enables me to have an enjoyable time with friends/family	3.79	0.869	4.00	0.697	0.000	2.01 ***	[1.47, 2.76]		
I like to talk to everybody about my local product experiences	3.36	0.981	3.70	0.812	0.000	2.20 ***	[1.68, 2.88]		
I want to give advice about local product experiences to people who want to travel	3.47	1.006	3.76	0.801	0.000	1.96 ***	[1.48, 2.58]		
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.831	3.54	0.8320	3.83	0.653	0.000			0.29 **	[0.19, 0.39]

Table 6. *Cont.*

Local products contain a lot of fresh ingredients produced in a local area	3.67	0.898	3.92	0.762	0.000	1.80 ***	[1.35, 2.42]		
Local food is nutritious	3.51	0.897	3.70	0.786	0.007	1.42 *	[1.08, 1.85]		
Tasting local food keeps me healthy	3.37	0.905	3.54	0.815	0.006	1.45 **	[1.12, 1.89]		
HEALTH CONCERNS Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.876	3.52	0.821	3.72	0.691	0.001			0.20 **	[0.10, 0.31]
I am constantly sampling new and different food products	3.63	0.903	3.68	0.851	0.548	1.08	[0.82, 1.42]		
I usually do not avoid food products that I have not tasted before	3.69	1.018	3.66	0.961	0.502	0.99	[0.76, 1.30]		
FOOD NEOPHILIA Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.690	3.66	0.824	3.67	0.808	0.883			0.008	[-0.10, 0.12]

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Variables in capitals are constructed in order to evaluate tourists’ responses. Ordinal and linear logistic regression outcome: gender. Category: female. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.5. Food Satisfaction

Data on the degree of satisfaction with the overall trip experience as well as with the food consumed are shown in Table 7. Overall, female respondents reported a higher level of satisfaction than male respondents both for their trip ($M = 4.38 > 4.28$ and $p = 0.006$) and for the food they tasted ($M = 4.05 > 3.91$ and $p = 0.017$). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the final food satisfaction scale was 0.926, indicating that the scale components had significant internal consistency. Regression analysis confirmed that female respondents were more satisfied by their food experience, as women’s overall score was higher by 0.20 points on a five-point Likert scale compared to men’s. In conclusion, the results allow us to confirm hypothesis 5: gender plays a significant role in tourists’ level of satisfaction with food.

Table 7. Men and women’s’ level of satisfaction with the trip as a whole and with the food tasted.

Variables	Gender				Mann-Whitney U Test <i>p</i> -Value	Ordinal Logistic Regression		Linear Regression	
	Male		Female			OR	95% CI	β	95% CI
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
I am satisfied with the whole travel experience	4.28	0.638	4.38	0.663	0.006	1.24	[0.72, 2.15]		
I am satisfied with the food that I tasted (products and services)	4.00	0.743	4.14	0.720	0.007	1.35	[0.94, 1.93]		
I am satisfied with the local food that I tasted	3.85	0.902	3.99	0.837	0.036	1.25	[0.92, 1.71]		
I will eat local food again at this destination	3.99	0.839	4.07	0.770	0.189	1.34	[0.97, 1.86]		
I will recommend local food to my friends or relatives	3.83	0.921	3.98	0.794	0.024	1.67 **	[1.23, 2.24]		
FOOD SATISFACTION Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.926	3.91	0.777	4.05	0.702	0.017			0.20 *	[0.10, 0.31]

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Variables in capitals are constructed in order to evaluate tourists’ responses. Ordinal and linear logistic regression outcome: gender. Category: female. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

4.6. The Pandemic Effects on Food-Related Behaviour

Differences were found between the two travel periods concerning the type of dining facilities used by the respective tourists presented in Table 8. More specifically, both men and women who travelled during the pandemic reported preparing their meals at their place of stay at a higher frequency compared to those who travelled before ($M_{male} = 2.50 > 2.18$ and $p = 0.015$, $M_{female} = 2.50 > 2.21$ and $p = 0.013$). The former

also reported dining at Greek restaurants and taverns more frequently compared to the latter ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.53 > 2.86$ and $p < 0.001$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.70 > 3.04$ and $p < 0.001$). Moreover, a low preference for fast food or street food was more prevalent during the pandemic compared to before ($M_{\text{male}} = 2.24 < 2.72$ and $p < 0.001$, $M_{\text{female}} = 1.91 < 2.60$ and $p < 0.001$). During the pandemic, male respondents reported avoiding restaurants serving international cuisine more often compared to their counterparts who travelled before the pandemic ($M_{\text{male}} = 1.33 < 1.60$ and $p < 0.001$). Female respondents, on the other hand, reported avoiding snack bars, coffee houses and beach bars more often during the pandemic ($M_{\text{male}} = 2.40 < 2.78$ and $p < 0.002$); instead, they preferred to dine at their place of stay more often during than before the pandemic ($M_{\text{female}} = 2.80 > 2.41$ and $p < 0.001$). The regression analysis results showed that during the pandemic, the odds of being “more likely” (i.e., usually or frequently vs. never) to use the dining facilities at their place of stay was 1.67 times higher compared to before the pandemic, but only for female respondents. Both genders demonstrated a higher frequency of preparing their meals at their place of stay ($OR_{\text{male}} = OR_{\text{female}} = 1.46$) and dining at Greek restaurants and tavernas during the pandemic ($OR_{\text{male}} = 2.89$, $OR_{\text{female}} = 2.90$). Similarly, both genders avoided fast food and street food outlets during the pandemic, with women, however, showing a relatively higher tendency ($OR_{\text{male}} = 0.51 > OR_{\text{female}} = 0.26$). Furthermore, only male respondents demonstrated a tendency to avoid restaurants serving international cuisine ($OR_{\text{male}} = 0.36$) and only female respondents avoided snack bars, coffee houses and beach bars ($OR_{\text{female}} = 0.60$) during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the results partially allow us to confirm Hypothesis 6: gender has a moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists’ choices of particular dining facilities, such as fast food and street food outlets, restaurants serving international cuisine, snack bars, coffee houses and beach bars.

Secondly, as presented in Table 9, the percentage of money spent on food during the trip varies between the two periods: participants who travelled during the pandemic spent more money on food compared to those who travelled before ($M_{\text{male}} = 36.71 > 33.45$ and $p = 0.001$, $M_{\text{female}} = 40.06 > 31.50$ and $p < 0.001$). Finally, differences between the two travel periods were found in respect to men’s and women’s attitudes toward food. Participants of both genders had a more favourable attitude toward food during the pandemic compared to before ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.60 > 3.38$ and $p = 0.001$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.84 > 3.52$ and $p < 0.001$). In general, men and women reported being motivated to taste local food during the pandemic, driven by a desire for cultural experience ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.09 > 3.92$ and $p = 0.005$, $M_{\text{female}} = 4.34 > 4.07$ and $p < 0.001$), sensory appeal ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.44 > 4.27$ and $p = 0.016$, $M_{\text{female}} = 4.51 > 4.38$ and $p = 0.041$) and as a result of health concerns ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.61 > 3.44$ and $p = 0.001$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.88 > 3.54$ and $p < 0.001$) compared to before the pandemic. On the other hand, only female respondents showed a higher motivation concerning excitement ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.86 > 3.69$ and $p = 0.015$) and interpersonal relation ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.90 > 3.74$ and $p = 0.005$). Differences concerning food neophilia were not found ($p > 0.05$). Finally, only female respondents reported being more satisfied with the food they tasted during the pandemic compared to their counterparts before ($M_{\text{female}} = 4.14 > 3.94$ and $p = 0.001$). The regression analysis showed that the money spent by women tourists during the pandemic exceeded the money spent by their counterparts prior to the pandemic by 8.6%. Participants of both genders demonstrated a more positive attitude towards food during the pandemic, with women showing relatively higher scores ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.30 > \beta_{\text{male}} = 0.20$). Female, but not male respondents, presented a higher motivation for gaining cultural experience ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.26$), excitement ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.17$), interpersonal relations ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.16$), and addressing health concerns ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.16$) during the pandemic. On the other hand, male respondents, but not female, were found to be more motivated by sensory appeal ($\beta_{\text{male}} = 0.17$) during the pandemic. Finally, female respondents’ food satisfaction was higher by 0.17 points on a five-point Likert scale during the pandemic compared to the degree of satisfaction reported by their counterparts prior to the pandemic ($\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.17$), while no differences emerged for their male counterparts.

Table 8. The pandemic’s effect on dining facilities visited.

Variables	Gender				Mann-Whitney U Test	Ordinal Logistic Regression			Gender				Mann-Whitney U Test	Ordinal Logistic Regression		
	Male		Female			<i>p</i> -Value	OR	95% CI	Before the Pandemic		During the Pandemic			<i>p</i> -Value	OR	95% CI
	N = 205		N = 165		N = 224				N = 250							
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD						
Dining facilities at the place of stay	2.31	1.162	2.43	1.019	0.106	1.39	[0.93, 2.08]	2.41	1.253	2.80	1.137	0.000	1.67 **	[1.19, 2.36]		
Own preparation of meals at the place of stay	2.18	1.112	2.50	1.257	0.015	1.46 *	[1.13, 1.89]	2.21	1.124	2.50	1.268	0.013	1.46 *	[1.13, 1.89]		
Greek restaurants and tavernas	2.86	1.121	3.53	1.156	0.000	2.89 ***	[1.95, 4.29]	3.04	1.156	3.70	1.142	0.000	2.90 ***	[2.05, 4.13]		
Fast food and street food	2.72	1.301	2.24	1.077	0.000	0.51 ***	[0.33, 0.77]	2.60	1.270	1.91	0.836	0.000	0.26 ***	[0.17, 0.40]		
Restaurants serving international cuisine	1.60	0.803	1.33	0.645	0.000	0.36 **	[0.13, 0.89]	1.47	0.764	1.41	0.725	0.294	1.03	[0.49, 2.18]		
Snack bars, Coffee houses, Beach bars	2.71	1.251	2.43	1.007	0.083	0.75	[0.50, 1.12]	2.78	1.202	2.40	1.000	0.002	0.60 **	[0.42, 0.85]		

Note. N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Ordinal and Linear logistic regression Outcome: gender. Categories: female. * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01, *** *p* < 0.001.

Table 9. The pandemic’s effect on money spent on food, food attitude, motivations, and satisfaction.

Variables	Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test	Linear Regression			Gender				Mann–Whitney U Test	Linear Regression		
	Male					p-Value	β	95% CI	Female					p-Value	β	95% CI
	Before the Pandemic N = 205		During the Pandemic N = 165		Before the pandemic N = 224				During the pandemic N = 250							
	M	SD	M	SD	M				SD	M	SD					
Percentage (%) of money for food	33.45	19.939	36.71	12.697	0.001	3.2	[−0.7, 7.2]	31.50	20.046	40.06	21.702	0.000	8.57 ***	[4.32, 12.81]		
ATTITUDE TOWARD FOOD	3.38	0.83	3.60	0.870	0.001	0.20 *	[0.03, 0.37]	3.52	0.736	3.84	0.685	0.000	0.30 **	[0.18, 0.42]		
CULTURAL EXPERIENCE	3.92	0.874	4.09	1.03	0.005	0.17	[−0.03, 0.36]	4.07	0.691	4.34	0.693	0.000	0.26 **	[0.14, 0.39]		
SENSORY APPEAL	4.27	0.748	4.44	0.684	0.016	0.17 *	[0.02, 0.32]	4.38	0.705	4.51	0.597	0.041	0.13	[0.02, 0.25]		
EXCITEMENT	3.67	0.88	3.66	0.720	0.865	−0.01	[−0.17, 0.16]	3.69	0.753	3.86	0.635	0.015	0.17 *	[0.04, 0.29]		
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	3.59	0.825	3.47	0.838	0.719	−0.12	[−0.29, 0.05]	3.74	0.685	3.90	0.614	0.005	0.16 *	[0.04, 0.28]		
HEALTH CONCERNS	3.44	0.741	3.61	0.902	0.001	−0.12	[−0.29, 0.05]	3.54	0.667	3.88	0.674	0.000	0.16 *	[0.04, 0.28]		
FOOD NEOPHILIA	3.66	0.739	3.67	0.921	0.431	0.01	[−0.15, 0.18]	3.62	0.763	3.72	0.845	0.094	0.10	[−0.04, 0.24]		
FOOD SATISFACTION	3.90	0.789	3.93	0.763	0.451	−0.12	[−0.29, 0.05]	3.94	0.728	4.14	0.665	0.001	0.17 *	[0.04, 0.29]		

Note: N = 844. The highest value is marked in bold when the difference is statistically significant. Variables in capitals are constructed in order to evaluate tourists’ responses. Linear logistic regression outcome: gender. Category: female. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In conclusion, the results allow us to confirm Hypothesis 7: gender has a significant moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' attitudes toward food.

Furthermore, the results allow us to confirm Hypothesis 8: gender has a significant moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' motivations concerning the consumption of local food.

In contrast, Hypothesis 9 is not accepted: gender does not have a significant moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' food-related personality traits.

Finally, the results allow us to confirm Hypothesis 10: gender has a significant moderating role in the effect of the pandemic on tourists' satisfaction with food.

5. Discussion

This study was conducted during two comparable high-season tourist periods before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the use of a uniform methodology and the recruitment of participants from the same population pool during the two travel periods, significant differences in gender profiles were observed, and our sample is slightly biased in favour of women. Nowadays, prior to departure, tourists increasingly use Facebook to seek information, select their travel destinations, and share their impressions with friends and acquaintances upon their return [75]. To this end, women surpass men in search activities and are more likely to read reviews or rate services in order to increase convenience or quality and avoid risky activities, while men's use of online reviews depends on their expertise level [33,76,77].

Food attitudes, motivations, and satisfaction have been examined by many studies and can explain tourists' food-related behaviour [7–9,18,50]. The present study shows that female tourists have a more positive attitude towards food and in general, are more motivated to taste Greek food compared to their male counterparts. In that sense, female tourists appear more willing to experience local gastronomy. This finding is in accordance with findings by other researchers who have reported that women are especially interested and enthusiastic about local cuisine while on vacation, a phenomenon connected to a tendency to explore local food [6,16,19,33].

Women have also been found to give greater importance to healthy eating [4] and care more about the safety and healthiness of food than men [16]. Wądołowska et al. [36] demonstrated that women are more concerned than men about health issues, nutrition information, and a healthy diet. Furthermore, women have been found to be more motivated in gaining cultural experiences and increase their knowledge through their contact with local cuisines in an attempt to gain an authentic experience [33]. Additionally, women appear to be more excited about tasting local food. Kim et al. [16] highlighted that women feel excitement when tasting local food; Sengel et al. [33] showed that women perceive their encounters with local cuisines as a way to escape from daily routine, while particularly motivated by interpersonal relations. Kim et al. [17] reported women's concern about interpersonal relationships, while Zhang et al. [41] found that their travel motivations are often influenced by other family members and their friends.

The present study did not reveal any differences between men and women with regards to neophilic or neophobic personality traits; this may be explained by the fact that tourists in our sample represented various backgrounds, i.e., cultural backgrounds that promote women's civil liberties as well as cultures that are conservative in gender issues. However, women were found to be more satisfied compared to men by their food experiences during their holiday in Greece; this finding is in accordance with the argument that the level of satisfaction depends on tourists' attitudes and motivations towards gastronomy [7–9,18]. Furthermore, as expected, participants' food attitudes and motivations are reflected in their dining preferences while in Greece. In our study, female participants chose to dine in Greek restaurants or taverns at a higher rate than men, while, they also visited the dining facilities at their place of stay more often.

The pandemic affected women's choices for food outlets, as they preferred to dine at facilities that they perceived as safe, avoiding snack bars, coffee houses, and beach bars.

Both men and women avoided visiting fast food and street food outlets; women clearly surpassed men in this respect. Due to the pandemic, tourists' risk perceptions have been more pronounced [27,78]; in our study, this phenomenon was confirmed primarily for our female participants. During the pandemic, the assurance of safety and security has been a crucial aspect of service quality that influences eating habits and overall physical and mental health [79]. Ensuring a secluded environment appears to weigh considerably on visitors' choices and reflects a strong preference for hygiene standards, safety, and privacy while on vacation [62]. Being of a more cautious nature [33,58,59], women are inclined to select a safe environment for dining, such as the restaurants in the hotel where they stay.

Our findings indicate that female participants spent more money on food during the pandemic compared to their male counterparts. They seemed to be more motivated to taste local food compared to prior to the pandemic, especially regarding cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relations, and health concerns. Only sensory appeal was found to be higher in male participants. As mentioned above, women are interested in tasting local cuisine; this particular tendency became even greater during the pandemic period. In line with Badora et al. [61], during the pandemic, women were more open to looking for local dishes while travelling and enjoying the experience of local culture through food. Despite the fact that women evaluate risks more negatively than men [63,64,66], food not only remains a primary cultural reference, but female tourists appear to be increasingly motivated to seek authentic experiences, learn about local traditions, and experience a sense of place and identity through local food. During the pandemic, physical and self-care motivation has been crucial for those travelling [52]. Due to social distancing and travel restrictions, the interpersonal motivations of tourists, such as spending time with family or friends, and socializing with other travellers, have become predominant. The desire for togetherness encourages positive emotions and helps overcome the crisis with a strong sense of community belonging [79]. The desire to experience novelty [80], relaxation, or a sense of social responsibility to support the local economy [81] sometimes follows an external shock. It is normal for people to express a need for new tastes when they are physically and emotionally exhausted [27].

Despite the restrictions during the pandemic, female participants expressed higher levels of satisfaction with acquired food experiences. It should be noted that visitors' food satisfaction includes their appreciation of local cuisine and their desire to consume it anew at the destination or recommend it to others. Satisfaction and loyalty to a destination are inextricably linked [8]; positive word-of-mouth from satisfied tourists who have visited a destination during a time of crisis is essential for attracting new visitors [82]. Positive associations with behavioural intentions, perceived value, and satisfaction outweigh the negative effects of other pandemic measures, including activity closures and inadequate service availability. When tourists feel content, they enjoy unrestricted activities with less anxiety and fear [82].

6. Conclusions

This research compared and contrasted tourists' food-related behaviours in Greece, considering the gender factor. The gender factor was taken into consideration in order to understand how unprecedented circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic impact tourist behaviour. The study findings show that, in general, women's attitude towards food during the entire trip was positive, while their quest for cultural experience, excitement, and interpersonal relations motivated them to consume local food more frequently than men. In addition, women visited restaurants and taverns serving Greek cuisine more frequently compared to men. In contrast, men dined more frequently at fast food and street food outlets. Women also reported feeling satisfied with their culinary experience and keen to recommend to others the dishes they tasted while visiting Greece at higher rates compared to men. Both men and women who travelled during the COVID-19 pandemic were found to be concerned about the health risks imposed, albeit women appeared to be more so. Most notably, women's tendency to avoid snack bars, coffee houses, and

beach bars was more prevalent during the pandemic as opposed to prior to the pandemic. Women's level of satisfaction with culinary experiences during the pandemic was found to be higher compared to that before the pandemic, whereas no difference emerged for men. Finally, women spent more money on food, in all likelihood, in an effort to meet the desired quality and safety standards. Overall, women's behaviour is deemed as being more compatible with the principles of a tourist destination's sustainable development.

This study represents progress in food tourism research as, to the best of the authors' knowledge, it is the first attempt to evaluate tourists' food-related behaviours according to gender. Gender differences are useful indicators for marketing plans that can be compared to previous outcomes and used as a benchmark to further improve the food products and services offered at the destination. This research provides relevant evidence to food-tourism stakeholders so that they can effectively plan a pandemic recovery strategy, providing a variety of activities and services in a safe environment. It would be helpful to apply different strategies and tailor-made solutions focused on the promotion of special foods according to the client's gender.

Despite the study's relevant theoretical and practical contributions, there are a number of limitations to note. First, due to globalisation, understanding consumer behaviour in a variety of contexts has become increasingly important, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries. Therefore, future studies should investigate the validation of the current study findings in other destinations. Secondly, the heterogeneity of the sample demographics, in which more female than male tourists participated in the survey, should be taken into consideration. In addition, future research should consider other sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, nationality, education) as moderator variables and how they alter the strength of the relationship between gender and tourists' food-related behaviour. Third, because participants in this study were recruited through Facebook, the sample was limited to individuals who were active in social media while on vacation. Future research may employ probability sampling methods to refine and validate the results. Finally, it should be taken into account that gender differences may also exist between the sexes; in some cases, a person's assigned sex and gender do not align, and the person may be transgender. In this study, "gender" refers to the social and cultural meaning attached to men's and women's biological sexes. Therefore, utilizing multiple scales could provide a more nuanced measurement of two interdependent concepts.

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