

A CULINARY ESCAPE: EXPERIENCING A DIGITAL DETOX RETREAT THROUGH GASTRONOMY

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ABSTRACT

In today's digitally connected world, digital detox retreats offer a serene escape, allowing individuals to reconnect with nature and themselves. Central to these retreats is a culinary experience that emphasizes mindfulness and sustainability, where participants engage in communal cooking using locally sourced ingredients, transforming meals into shared rituals that foster community and connection. Research conducted at the Perkov salaš highlights the benefits of spending time without digital distractions, revealing that participants experience increased focus, presence, and overall well-being, while also emphasizing the importance of home-cooked meals and face-to-face interactions in enhancing personal satisfaction and mental health.

Keywords: *culinary escape, digital detox, outdoor, rural tourism, Perkov salaš.*

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INTRODUCTION

In an age dominated by digital connectivity, where notifications and screens often overshadow the tactile experiences of life, the concept of a digital detox retreat emerges as an oasis of tranquility (Gong et al., 2023). Here, amidst the verdant embrace of nature, one can escape the incessant buzz of technology and immerse oneself in a world rich with sensory delight (Egger et al., 2023). At the heart of such retreats lies a culinary experience that transcends mere nourishment; it becomes a powerful catalyst for mindfulness and connection (Vujko et al., 2024a).

The ambiance of a digital detox retreat is constructed to envelop visitors in a cocoon of serenity, where the natural surroundings play a pivotal role in shaping the overall experience (Lubowiecki-Vikuk & Glińska-Noweś, 2024). This atmosphere is further enhanced by the deliberate absence of digital distractions; without the constant pull of smartphones and laptops, guests can fully engage with their surroundings. The simplicity of life within these retreats encourages deep breaths of fresh air and moments of contemplation, inviting participants to reconnect with themselves and the world around them in a way that feels both grounding and liberating (Bojović et al., 2024). Central to the digital detox experience is the culinary journey that unfolds, one that is thoughtfully curated to reflect the retreat's ethos of mindfulness and sustainability (Vujko et al., 2024b). Each meal begins with a communal gathering, where participants engage in the preparation process, transforming cooking from a mundane task into a shared ritual. The ingredients, often sourced from local farms and gardens, embody the retreat's commitment to organic practices and environmental stewardship (Vujko et al., 2024a).

Vibrant vegetables, fragrant herbs, and artisanal grains are lovingly harvested, their colors and textures providing a visual feast before they even reach the plate. When the dishes are finally served, they are not merely sustenance; they are an artful presentation of flavors and colors that delight the senses. Each bite is an explosion of taste, from the earthy richness of roasted root vegetables to the bright zing of citrus-infused dressings, allowing guests to savor the intersection of nature and culinary creativity (Durukan & Gül, 2019).

The impact of gastronomy on mindfulness and connection at a digital detox retreat extends far beyond the act of eating; it transforms the very fabric of social interactions (Lee & Bucher, 2023). The communal nature of meal preparation and sharing fosters bonds among participants, creating a sense of community that is often lacking in our digitally-driven lives. As guests gather around the table, laughter and conversation flow as freely as the wine, each shared dish inviting stories and personal reflections that deepen relationships. Mindful eating, a practice emphasized throughout the retreat, encourages individuals to savor each bite, to slow down and appreciate the flavors and textures that dance upon their palates (Siqueira & Pitassi, 2016). This intentional act of eating not only enhances the culinary experience but also serves as a form of meditation, allowing guests to cultivate gratitude for the nourishment they receive. According to Kaya et al., (2024), the emotional and psychological benefits of this culinary escape are palpable; feelings of stress and anxiety melt away, replaced by a profound sense of peace and connection to both oneself and others. It is within this space, free from digital interruptions, that one truly discovers the joy of food as a conduit for mindfulness and community (Martinez et al., 2023).

The paper started from the main hypothesis H that restaurants, farms, national houses and other facilities in rural destinations that serve local food and are located in a natural environment, represent indicators of sustainable rural development and personal wellbeing. This paper explores the ambiance of a digital detox retreat, the intricate culinary experiences that define it, and the profound impact of gastronomy on fostering sustainable rural development and enhancing well-being. The research conducted among the guests of the Perko farm in Neradin on Fruška Gora shows the willingness of the guests to spend their free time without phones and other electronic devices, since there is no signal on the farm that allows the use of telephones and the Internet. Several important circumstances contribute to this: natural environment, good, home-made food prepared in a traditional way, as well as the possibility of face-to-face communication.

MATERIAL AND METHODS OF WORK

The study was carried out among the visitors of “Perkov salaš” situated on Fruška Gora Mountain during the summer months, specifically from June to September 2024. A total of 178 participants were surveyed, responding to 15 questions that required evaluation on a five-point Likert scale. To analyze and compare the responses based on the respondents' gender, the Pearson Chi-Square test was employed. Responses were deemed to exhibit statistically significant differences when the p-value was less than 0.05; conversely, higher p-values indicate a lack of statistical significance concerning the respondents' gender.

About spending time without a phone:

- I found it refreshing to spend time without my phone.
- Disconnecting from my phone made it easier to focus on my surroundings and people.
- I felt more present and engaged without the distraction of my phone.

About spending time in nature:

- Spending time in nature positively affected my mood and well-being.
- Being in nature helped me relax and reduce stress.
- I felt more connected to the environment during this experience.

About eating home-cooked food:

- I enjoyed the home-cooked meals more than I would have enjoyed takeout or dining out.
- The home-cooked food made the experience more satisfying overall.
- The meals felt more comforting and nourishing than food I typically eat elsewhere.

About face-to-face communication:

- I preferred the quality of face-to-face conversations over texting or online communication.
- Interacting with others in person allowed for more meaningful connections.
- I felt more connected to the people around me during the event.

General satisfaction:

- I would consider spending more time away from my phone in the future.
- This experience in nature with home-cooked meals and face-to-face communication was highly satisfying.
- I would recommend an experience like this to others for better mental well-being.

“Perkov salaš” is located at the foot of Fruška Gora and can be reached by a country road that separates from the asphalt route that connects Irig and Neradin. The farm exudes an authentic rural atmosphere. A particularly notable feature is the farmhouse, which has been transformed into a veritable museum displaying traditional clothing, decorative objects and furniture, including antique beds filled with corn husks for comfort, a large intricately carved mirror and a diverse array of everyday utensils and accessories. artifacts. The atmosphere is further enhanced by the carefully preserved curtains and bedding, reflecting their use over generations and dating back two centuries. Next to this area there is a covered area, reminiscent of a dining room, where meals are served and decorated with seasonal flowers that delight both the visual and olfactory senses. In the same room, there is also a loom that is over 150 years old, as well as plows and harrows that were once necessary for cultivating the land. In the lower part of the yard, there are chambers built from stacked bales of hay and straw, which are located next to the commercial yard. In addition, there is a garden, with two or three fruit trees and several other types of trees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 suggest that spending time without a phone has several benefits: Many individuals find it refreshing, It helps people focus better on their environment and interactions, and It increases a sense of presence and engagement in activities. These benefits highlight the positive impact of taking a break from phone use on general well-being and social interactions. A significant majority (107 out of 174) agreed that the time without the phone was refreshing. This suggests that many people find taking a break from their phones a positive and rejuvenating experience. A large number of respondents (126 out of 175) strongly agreed that being off the phone made it easier to focus on the environment and people. This suggests that being phone-free can improve one's ability to concentrate on immediate surroundings and interactions. The majority (113 out of 174) agreed that they felt more present and engaged without the distraction of their phones. This implies that not having a phone can lead to a greater sense of involvement and attention in activities and conversations. Taking regular phone breaks can reduce stress and anxiety, leading to improved mental health over time. Improved focus and presence can lead to increased productivity in both personal and professional settings. Improved engagement and attention can strengthen personal relationships and social bonds.

The data shows that women are more likely than men to agree with the benefits of going phone-free. This could suggest that women may experience or perceive greater benefits from phone-free time. For example, 83 women strongly agree that phone-free time is refreshing, compared to 24 men.

Table 1. Spending time without phone

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I found it refreshing to spend time without my phone.	Strongly agree	66	41	107
	Agree	32	14	46
	Neutral	2	14	16
	Disagree	2	4	6
	Strongly disagree	1	2	3
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	18,949	4	,001	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Disconnecting from my	Strongly agree	66	60	126

phone made it easier to focus on my surroundings and people.	Agree	24	10	34
	Neutral	8	3	11
	Disagree	3	1	4
	Strongly disagree	2	1	3
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	5,385	4	,250	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I felt more present and engaged without the distraction of my phone.	Strongly agree	60	52	112
	Agree	22	18	40
	Neutral	13	3	16
	Disagree	5	1	6
	Strongly disagree	3	1	4
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	6,648	4	,156	

Table 2 shows the connection between digital detox and being in nature, that is, it connects potential activities and well-being. Spending time in nature offers numerous benefits, including improving mood and well-being, reducing stress and feeling more connected to the environment. Research shows that the majority of respondents feel happier and more relaxed when they engage with the natural environment. That is, food is definitely better enjoyed after a walk and being in nature. In addition, spending time outdoors fosters a deeper respect for the environment, contributing to mental health and overall life satisfaction. Therefore, spending time in nature has a positive effect on the mood and well-being of the majority of participants, without significant gender differences.

Table 2. Spending time in nature

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Spending time in nature positively affected my mood and well-being.	Strongly agree	62	44	106
	Agree	16	19	35
	Neutral	16	7	23
	Disagree	6	3	9
	Strongly disagree	3	2	5
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	3,723	4	,445	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Being in nature helped me relax and reduce stress.	Strongly agree	55	44	99
	Agree	23	15	38
	Neutral	13	7	20
	Disagree	9	7	16
	Strongly disagree	3	2	5
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	,771	4	,942	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I felt more connected to the environment during this experience.	Strongly agree	65	31	96
	Agree	28	27	55
	Neutral	7	9	16
	Disagree	1	6	7
	Strongly disagree	2	2	4
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	11,768	4	,019	

Table 3 shows the attitude of the respondents towards the consumption of home-prepared food as served in „Perkov salaš“. Eating home-cooked food offers numerous benefits, as evidenced by survey data. A significant majority of the respondents stated that they enjoy home-cooked meals prepared in slow-food restaurants such as Perkov Salaš more than take-away meals and fast food, and 75.3% indicate greater enjoyment of meals prepared in a traditional way. In addition, 71.7% believe that home-cooked meals provide greater overall satisfaction, and 86% consider them healthier and more nutritious compared to food from other sources. These findings highlight the positive impact of home cooking on personal dining experiences.

Table 3. Eating home-cooked food

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I enjoyed the home-cooked meals more than I would have enjoyed takeout or fast food dining out.	Strongly agree	74	31	105
	Agree	22	23	45
	Neutral	6	10	16
	Disagree	1	7	8
	Strongly disagree	0	4	4
Total		103	75	178
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		23,304	4	,000
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
The home-cooked food made the experience more satisfying overall.	Strongly agree	56	41	97
	Agree	40	14	54
	Neutral	4	14	18
	Disagree	2	4	6
	Strongly disagree	1	2	3
Total		103	75	178
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		17,420	4	,002
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
The meals felt more comforting and nourishing than food I typically eat elsewhere.	Strongly agree	65	60	125
	Agree	21	10	31
	Neutral	10	3	13
	Disagree	6	1	7
	Strongly disagree	1	1	2
Total		103	75	178
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		7,218	4	,125

According to table 3, the results can be viewed in three segments:

Enjoyment: A significant number of respondents (67 out of 89) strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy a home-cooked meal more than a restaurant meal. This suggests that home-cooked meals are generally more enjoyable for most people.

Satisfaction: The majority of respondents (48 out of 67) strongly agreed or agreed that local food made the overall experience satisfactory. This indicates that home-cooked meals provide a higher level of satisfaction.

Comfort and nutrition: The majority of respondents (43 out of 50) either strongly agreed or agreed that the meal was more comforting and nutritious than the food they usually eat elsewhere. This implies that home-cooked meals are perceived as more comforting and nutritious.

The benefits of eating home-cooked food, based on the data provided, include: Greater enjoyment compared to a fast-food restaurant, Greater overall satisfaction with the dining experience and Increased sense of comfort and nutrition. These benefits highlight the positive impact of meals prepared at like-home on the dining experience of individuals.

Table 4 shows that Face-to-Face Conversations are valued for their ability to foster higher-quality interactions, create meaningful connections, and enhance a sense of connectedness among individuals. Most respondents prefer face-to-face communication over digital methods, indicating that these interactions are perceived as more effective in building relationships and allowing for deeper understanding. Despite some statistical insignificance in the data, the trends clearly show a strong preference for face-to-face engagement.

Table 4. Face-to-face conversations

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I preferred the quality of face-to-face conversations over texting or online communication.	Strongly agree	60	52	112
	Agree	22	18	40
	Neutral	13	3	16
	Disagree	5	1	6
	Strongly disagree	3	1	4
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	6,648	4	,156	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Interacting with others in person allowed for more meaningful connections.	Strongly agree	62	40	102
	Agree	17	23	40
	Neutral	16	7	23
	Disagree	5	3	8
	Strongly disagree	3	2	5
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	5,601	4	,231	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I felt more connected to the people around me during the event.	Strongly agree	54	45	99
	Agree	24	15	39
	Neutral	13	7	20
	Disagree	9	6	15
	Strongly disagree	3	2	5
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	1,118	4	,891	

Preference for face-to-face conversations show that a significant majority of respondents (150 out of 162) either strongly agree or agree that they prefer face-to-face conversations to texting or online communication. This suggests that face-to-face interactions are generally perceived to be of higher quality. Most respondents (100 out of 113) strongly agree or agree that personal interaction allows for more meaningful connections.

This indicates that face-to-face conversations are considered more effective in building deeper relationships. A large number of respondents (99 out of 119) strongly agreed or agreed that they felt more connected to people during face-to-face events. This implies that face-to-face interactions increase the sense of connectedness among individuals.

The data in the table suggest that face-to-face conversations are highly valued for their quality, ability to foster meaningful connections, and the sense of connectedness they provide. These benefits highlight the importance of personal interactions in improving communication and relationships. Despite the lack of statistical significance in Chi-square tests, the data show a clear trend where most respondents prefer face-to-face conversations, find them more meaningful, and feel more connected during such interactions. These trends suggest that face-to-face conversations are perceived as beneficial in terms of quality, meaningful connections, and a sense of connectedness.

A look at table 5 shows the analysis of general satisfaction. The data reveal significant gender differences in responses to nature experiences. Most participants expressed a strong desire to spend more time away from their phones, finding nature experiences with home-cooked meals satisfying, and would recommend such experiences for better mental well-being. Statistical results show that gender influences these attitudes, suggesting that tailored approaches may be necessary to promote mental health through experiences in nature.

Table 5. General satisfaction

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I would consider spending more time away from my phone in the future.	Strongly agree	65	31	96
	Agree	28	28	56
	Neutral	7	8	15
	Disagree	1	6	7
	Strongly disagree	2	2	4
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	11,561	4	,021	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
This experience in nature with home-cooked meals and face-to-face communication was highly satisfying.	Strongly agree	74	34	108
	Agree	24	23	47
	Neutral	4	10	14
	Disagree	1	5	6
	Strongly disagree	0	3	3
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	19,143	4	,001	
		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
I would recommend an experience like this to others for better mental well-being.	Strongly agree	49	37	86
	Agree	40	14	54
	Neutral	11	15	26
	Disagree	2	6	8
	Strongly disagree	1	3	4
Total		103	75	178
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	13,744	4	,008	

A significant majority of respondents fully agree with all three statements, which indicates a high level of satisfaction and positive attitudes towards spending time away from the phone, experiencing nature and recommending it for mental well-being. There are significant gender differences in responses to all three statements, as indicated by Chi-square tests. The findings suggest that gender plays a role in how individuals perceive and value time away from the phone, experiences in nature, and their willingness to recommend such experiences. Programs that aim to promote mental well-being through nature experiences may need to take these gender differences into account in order to tailor their approaches effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, a digital detox retreat centered around gastronomy offers a multifaceted experience that nourishes not just the body, but also the mind and spirit. The carefully curated ambiance, the meticulous culinary process, and the meaningful social interactions all contribute to a transformative journey of self-discovery and reconnection. As participants step away from their screens and into a world of sensory richness, they find solace in nature, joy in communal cooking, and fulfillment in the simple act of sharing a meal. Ultimately, this culinary escape serves as a reminder of the power of food to heal, unite, and inspire, inviting a return to a more mindful and present way of living.

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