



The Path of Zibo Barbecue from "Popular" to "Long-term Successful"

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Abstract: In recent years, local cultural tourism has vigorously promoted regional characteristics, aiming to capture traffic trends through "local symbols." Among these efforts, local cuisine within the cultural tourism sector has shone brightly, gaining significant popularity. Zibo barbecue, with its unique highlights, has attracted countless tourists and achieved remarkable success. Taking the development of Zibo barbecue as an example, this paper explores the measures that transformed this phenomenon from a "popular trend" to a "long-term success," thereby providing theoretical foundations and practical insights for the development of local culture and tourism.

Keywords: Zibo barbecue; popularity; long-term success; reference

1. Introduction

In 2023, Zibo's "small skewer + small cake + small onion" dining style and the ceremonial experience of "one table, one stove, and one dip" rapidly gained popularity on platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu. "Visiting Zibo for barbecue" became a new cultural phenomenon.

How did Zibo barbecue achieve such explosive popularity? Can it sustain this momentum? To address these questions, we conducted field visits and surveys targeting functional departments, barbecue restaurant owners, tourists, and local residents, aiming to understand the factors behind the rise of "Zibo barbecue."

2. Upgrading the integration of culture and tourism and extending the industrial chain

Zibo City seized the opportunity presented by the viral success of its barbecue culture to develop policies that convert transient "traffic" into lasting cultural-tourism engagement. By integrating traditional elements such as Boshan glaze, hand-painted fans, and calligraphy into the barbecue experience, the city has sustained its cultural appeal, bridging the gap between modern youth lifestyles and traditional Chinese culture[1].

According to the municipal cultural and tourism departments, Zibo has launched five themed products, including "Barbecue + Industrial Heritage" experiential tours, designed 10 tourism routes, and hosted over 400 cultural performances. These initiatives enriched the cultural-tourism supply chain and capitalized on the barbecue-driven influx of visitors. Additional measures, such as discounted entrance tickets and consumption vouchers for hotels, cultural products, and intangible heritage crafts, reduced scenic area fees by over 24 million yuan and boosted cultural-tourism consumption by more than 18 million yuan.

3. Policy Implementation and Market Support

The initial success of Zibo barbecue can be traced to the municipal government's 2019 Implementation Opinions on Tapping Consumption Potential and Promoting the Night Economy, which legitimized barbecue stalls and nighttime activities[2]. The subsequent online frenzy, triggered by college students traveling to Zibo via high-speed rail, further fueled the "barbecue industrial chain."

Zibo swiftly introduced supporting policies covering publicity, administrative approvals, industry self-regulation, transportation, accommodation, consumption, food safety, and price controls. These efforts showcased the city's proactive governance and agile response capabilities.

In a survey of nearly 500 respondents, 84.62% identified convenient transportation options (e.g., dedicated barbecue buses and trains) as the most attractive policy. Approximately 60% also highlighted benefits such as high-speed rail ticket exchanges for scenic spots and youth hostel discounts.

4. Optimizing City Services and Refining the City's IP

Since its rise to fame, every department, business, and citizen in Zibo has actively contributed to building a service-

oriented government and a humane city, striving to convert short-term "traffic" into long-term engagement.

Starting in 2015, Zibo promoted smokeless eco-friendly stoves, regulated open-air barbecues, and introduced ten operational standards to protect small-scale vendors. Post-pandemic, the city established a dedicated barbecue promotion task force to address tourist expectations. Key initiatives included public security patrol maps, 21 customized barbecue bus routes, standardized barbecue maps, and star-rated restaurant evaluations.

According to surveys, 73.22% of respondents praised Zibo's "vibrant atmosphere and hospitality," noting that the warmth and sincerity of locals reflect a deeply ingrained civic ethos. Citizens spontaneously organized volunteer services to uphold the city's reputation.

Now, Zibo with the "grill east wind", the city visibility greatly enhanced, so that in the past may not have paid attention to the city's enterprises, talent, willing to invest in Zibo, nesting Zibo. According to the Zibo Investment Promotion Bureau official website information, the number of companies invited to visit close to a thousand, reached a cooperation intention to receive hundreds of projects, the number are significantly increased with the previous period.[4]Leveraging this momentum, Zibo's visibility has attracted investments and talent. As reported by the Zibo Investment Promotion Bureau, nearly 1,000 companies have expressed interest in cooperation, with hundreds of projects reaching initial agreements—a significant increase compared to previous periods.

Moving forward, Zibo aims to enhance its business environment, refine urban soft power, and offer long-term incentives to attract industries. By promoting industrial renewal and urban development, the city seeks to transform a "momentary phenomenon" into a "lasting brand." [4]

5. Conclusion

The popularity of Zibo barbecue stems not only from its culinary appeal but also from its embodiment of local culture and customs. By leveraging food as a cultural symbol and creating diverse, sustainable scenarios, Zibo has unlocked the key to transitioning from fleeting trends to enduring success. This approach offers valuable lessons for other regions seeking to develop cultural tourism.

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