



# Hungry for Adventure

**Insights into consumer demand for  
new sensory and flavor experiences**

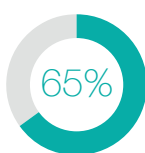
Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers were showing a growing interest in new and novel foods and beverages that took them places – through bold flavors, regionally inspired cuisines or nostalgic products that transported them back to childhood or provided an indulgent experience.

The lockdowns in 2020 certainly accelerated this demand. But it also looks as if this trend will have growing momentum, with a lasting impact on new product development.

For product marketers, it presents an important map for establishing a memorable brand narrative that will distinguish them in the marketplace and help position their brand as modern, innovative and fun.

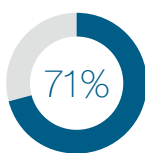
So who are these culinary travelers and what are they looking for? First and foremost, taste has always been integral to product acceptance, and as consumers have more choice, it is driving them to push the envelope.<sup>1</sup> In the broadest sense, consumers today are looking for something beyond the norm, seeking foods and beverages that provide a new experience or allow them to discover something unique to talk about with friends and family or post on social media.

To be sure, the pandemic lockdowns and travel restrictions heightened consumer interest in trying new regional cuisines at home while they were unable to travel. Coupled with the growing importance of posting food experiences on social media, these trends have helped the idea of adventurous eating take hold.



**65%** of consumers said travel restrictions during 2020 prompted their interest in trying new cultural foods at home.<sup>2</sup>

**Three in five global consumers are interested in trying new sensory experiences, such as aromas, tastes, textures, colors and sensations.**<sup>3</sup>



**71%** say they see themselves as adventurous when asked why they like new and exotic flavors.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of vicarious traveling through culinary experiences resonates across all generations, but young consumers seem to be the most adventurous. According to data from Whole Foods Markets, Gen Z sees themselves as foodies who know more about different cultures and foods through their digital research and adventures.<sup>5</sup> Millennials also like to enjoy memorable eating and drinking experiences. A recent study commissioned by *National Geographic* suggests that these 25–40-year-olds are less likely than older generations to eat food specific to their own culture, and seven in 10 said they enjoy cooking with rare and unknown ingredients.<sup>6</sup> Both of these young adult cohorts tend to gravitate toward bold and exotic flavors as a reflection of their multicultural makeup<sup>7</sup> (both Gen Z and millennials are more diverse than previous generations).

Older consumers also have some interest, although they may not be pushing the envelope as much. About two thirds of baby boomers are interested in exploring new flavors, but these older consumers say they prefer them in familiar formats.<sup>8</sup>

## Inspirational insights

To meet the demands of these arm-chair travelers, product formulators are using a variety of different techniques, from exotic ingredients to unique textures and bold flavors. Drawing inspiration and ingredients from global cuisines is one of the most obvious strategies, using ingredients and spices that evoke different cuisines, like turmeric, cardamom – or even fermentation – to associate products with Southeast Asia, North Africa or the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup>

Unique flavors and spices don't have to be from the other side of the world but simply from another part of the country, especially in a large nation with many diverse regional cuisines, such as the U.S. For example, this trend is inspiring new products that tout flavors and origins from regional barbecue styles to local pizza flavors.

What's more, the change of scenery doesn't always have to be about a different place. Consumers are also increasingly receptive to classic products from their childhood that take them back a few years or recall pleasant experiences, while adding a modern twist. In these cases, the destination may be more about familiarity or comfort, with foods and flavors that call to mind pleasant childhood summer days or important family occasions. This could include, for example, snacks that feature popular kids' cereal flavors or latte-flavored marshmallows.<sup>10</sup>

Beverages, from ready-to-drink teas to hard seltzers, have been another key area for these types of innovations. Product formulators are innovating with fruit and botanical blends featuring ingredients that offer interesting flavor combinations and ingredients that suggest tropical regions, such as coconut milk or hibiscus, those that pair well with coffee or tea, such as chocolate or even smoky cocktails.

Desserts are another category ripe for innovation in adventurous flavors and outside-the-box concepts. Ice cream has been a leading segment for this technique, providing products with unique sensory experiences, such as sweet and salty, or tying into fun or comforting flavors, including cinnamon, coffee and hazelnut. These trends will likely surface in other indulgent sub-segments, such as confectionery, baked goods and other frozen desserts.

Prepared meal kits are also pushing the envelope on adventurous concepts, making cuisines more accessible for home cooks, from Vietnamese and North African dishes to Korean barbecue.

But as brands start down this journey, it is important that they maintain authenticity in their flavor and ingredient usage for specific cuisines. From there, they can engage consumers with the real history and culture behind globally and regionally inspired foods. In these products, ingredients can play an important role not only in enticing consumer trial, but also in building a brand narrative.<sup>11</sup>

As consumers continue to see themselves as more adventurous with respect to food and view these products as a way to express who they are, adventurous eating will likely gain ground. In other words, consumers will expand their boundaries of sensory appeal to include more of the products they use daily.<sup>12</sup>

**That said, FMCG Gurus analysts point out that brands should also remember that even as consumers seek out adventurous sensory and flavor experiences, they may also experience feelings of post-consumption guilt... especially if products are indulgent and not aligned with broader health values. This means that label-friendly, healthy ingredients – including flavors and sweeteners – will be an important and continuing baseline for products that help consumers explore the world from the comforts of home.**

Take consumers on a culinary adventure with label-friendly ingredients. [cargill.com/labelfriendly](https://www.cargill.com/labelfriendly).

<sup>1</sup> FMCG Gurus. "Experimenting with Flavor in 2021." September 2, 2021. <https://fmcggurus.com/blog/fmcg-gurus-experimenting-with-flavor-in-2021/>

<sup>2</sup> One Poll research conducted for Pearls Olives in: "Research Reveals the Food FOMO in America is on the Rise." SWNS. December 4, 2020. <https://swns-research.medium.com/research-reveals-that-food-fomo-in-america-is-on-the-rise-12434a80a6a6>

<sup>3</sup> Innova Market Insights. "Top Ten Trends 2021. Snacks."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. FMCG Gurus.

<sup>5</sup> Whole Foods Market data in: "Adventure Through Flavor." FONA International. March 22, 2021. <https://www.fona.com/articles/2021/03/adventure-through-flavor>

<sup>6</sup> *National Geographic* data in: "Millennials are Eating more Adventurously – Trying more Foreign Food and Even Catching their Own Dinner." "GoodNewsNetwork. September 26, 2021. <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/millennials-are-eating-more-adventurously-trying-more-foreign-food-and-even-catching-their-own-dinner/>

<sup>7</sup> Crowe, E. "How to Deliver What Today's Adventurous Food Consumers Want." Smartbrief. July 13, 2020. <https://corp.smartbrief.com/original/2020/07/series-how-deliver-what-todays-adventurous-food-consumers-want>

<sup>8</sup> Technomic's 2019 Generational Consumer Trend Report in FONA International, "Adventure Through Flavor" report.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. FONA International.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Innova Market Insights.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. FONA International