

Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024 Award Ceremony

Speech

Diane Dodd PhD



Diane Dodd PhD, President IGCAT - Spain

Diane Dodd PhD is President/founder of IGCAT (International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism) and co-founder of the World Region of Gastronomy Award. Together with the awarded World Regions of Gastronomy, she has pioneered the European Young Chef Award, the Food Film Menu, the World Food Gift Challenge, and the Top Websites for Foodie Travellers competitions. She is also Regional

Adviser for the global network IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies) and Executive Board member of the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia. She leads MA courses in Cultural Institutions and Policies and Events Management at the International University of Catalonia. She has been regularly engaged as an evaluator for the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe as well as consultant for European Capitals of Culture.

*This speech was made by Diane Dodd PhD at the Award Ceremony of Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024 on 24 September 2022, in Turín (Italy).

Mabruk Aseer for becoming the 1st World Region of Gastronomy in the MENA region. I couldn't be prouder of the brothers and sisters in this room that have worked so diligently to obtain the title. I would especially like to thank Mayada Badr of the Culinary Arts Commission for immediately recognizing the potential and together with her team led by Majed Almuhanha, reaching out and involving each of the stakeholders in the region; involving distinguished experts that have been working already for many years to protect and promote the colourful and unique cultural diversity found only in the Aseer region.

Becoming a World Region of Gastronomy is not just a title because you have great food. It is a responsibility. By 2024, your mission is for Aseer to lead on sustainable and healthier food not just in the region, or indeed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but across the whole MENA region.

We heard from Count Francisco de Calheiros, European Region of Gastronomy 2016 about the importance of safeguarding our planet, resuscitating plant and animal varieties and the need to cook, prepare and promote these. Because if we don't eat them, they won't produce them and the planet cannot afford to lose more biodiversity. This is your first challenge.

Your second challenge is to instill pride, touch hearts and fill the region with food stories, Wendie Barrie, an IGCAT Expert, Food Writer and chef has explained how important it is to encourage storytelling. The aim must be that every citizen is eager to share their food stories, for example, If you get in a taxi, the driver will be able to tell you about the food in Aseer.

The beautiful statement from George Hatzimarkos, Governor of the South Aegean, European Region of Gastronomy 2019 made it clear that many projects and events will bring your region together and build a beautiful and stronger legacy for the region. That strength comes from collaboration and affords your region to be resilient in times of hardship, for example the recent pandemic from which the South Aegean emerged stronger and even more sustainable. You need to use your stakeholder collaboration to build existing projects stronger by supporting one another and incentivise new events and projects in celebration of the title.

Therefore, the question of governance is important. Your third challenge will be not only to meet regularly, to collaborate and build projects; it will be to grow the stakeholder group and include more organisations. We encourage you to ensure voices representing local farmers, fisherman, producers and independent restaurateurs or hoteliers are present in the debates because it is often the smaller businesses and individuals that are doing the most to protect your food and cultural diversity.

Jaume Gomila, the motor behind Menorca, European Region of Gastronomy 2022 illustrated how passionate people become with the Award, how it transforms people's lives for the better and how it creates a new relationship to tourism because people recognize your respect for the environment and therefore also want to be responsible travelers seeking both authenticity and delighting in contemporary innovations on tradition. To attain this Menorca learnt so much from the other awarded regions in Europe and the sharing of knowledge has become an important aspect of being a member of the World Region of Gastronomy Platform. Participating in joint projects at an international level has not only given free visibility across the globe, it has also

injected pride into the citizens of the region. To be recognised by others is the best form of compliment and requires that you also recognise them. Menorca is learning that giving to others is reflected back ten-fold.

Aseer will receive high international visibility in 2024 and become known world-wide for quality, locally-produced and healthy food as well as exceptional, colourful and unique cultural experiences. I have every confidence you will make the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia proud and will contribute successfully to achieving Vision 2030 for Saudi Arabia, because you have all the right ingredients in Aseer and wonderfully talented people to bring these ingredients to the fore. Working together you will ensure this region is known internationally as the region of a thousand welcomes!

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