

## **Gastronomic Tourism as an Innovative Strategy to Increase the Attractiveness of Tourist Destinations**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores gastronomic tourism as an innovative strategy to enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations. As experiential tourism gains prominence, local culinary experiences have emerged as powerful tools for cultural engagement and destination differentiation. The objective of this research is to examine how gastronomic elements such as traditional dishes, culinary storytelling, and participatory food activities influence tourists' perceptions, emotional connections, and behavioral intentions. A qualitative method using a systematic literature review was employed, drawing on peer reviewed sources from 2020 to 2024 across disciplines including tourism, marketing, and cultural studies. The analysis identifies four key dimensions destination image, emotional engagement, policy integration, and development challenges as critical to the success of culinary tourism strategies. The findings show that gastronomy contributes not only to sensory satisfaction but also to cultural identity formation and emotional bonding, particularly when integrated with tourism policy frameworks. However, challenges such as limited local capacity and policy fragmentation persist in emerging destinations. The study concludes that strategic incorporation of gastronomy into tourism development can drive sustainability, competitiveness, and cultural preservation. Recommendations for future research include empirical validation and inclusive policy design to empower local communities through food based tourism.

**Keywords:** Gastronomic Tourism, Destination Attractiveness, Culinary Experience, Tourism Policy, Emotional Engagement, Food Heritage.

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### **1. Introduction**

The attractiveness of tourist destinations plays a pivotal role in determining the success and sustainability of tourism development. Destination attractiveness refers to the qualities or features of a location that motivate travelers to visit, return, and recommend the place to others [1]. It includes both tangible and intangible elements such as natural beauty, cultural resources, infrastructure, safety, and the overall tourist experience [2]. In recent years, scholars have emphasized that beyond physical and service related attributes, experiential factors particularly cultural and culinary experiences significantly contribute to perceived destination attractiveness. As such, tourism planners and marketers are increasingly looking toward innovative and immersive experiences to differentiate their offerings in the competitive global tourism market [3].

This shift is fueled by the changing preferences of modern travelers who seek authentic, localized, and engaging experiences that connect them to the identity and heritage of the destination [4]. One such form of experiential travel that has gained substantial academic and practical attention is gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic tourism involves travel with the primary purpose of experiencing local food, culinary traditions, and gastronomy related activities such as food festivals, cooking classes, or visits to local markets. This form of tourism not only offers sensory and emotional

satisfaction but also promotes cultural appreciation and cross cultural understanding. In global destinations like Spain, Japan, and Thailand, gastronomy has become a strategic tool to enhance destination image and boost tourism revenues. Despite its potential, gastronomic tourism remains underutilized in many emerging tourism destinations, often due to limited strategic planning and lack of integration with broader destination management policies [5].

The integration of gastronomy into tourism development provides an innovative approach to enhancing destination attractiveness. Gastronomic tourism aligns with sustainability values, supports local economies, and reinforces cultural preservation. It provides differentiation in markets where traditional tourism offerings are saturated or homogeneous [6]. Moreover, food based tourism can transform peripheral or rural destinations into vibrant tourist spots by promoting indigenous cuisines and culinary heritage. As tourists increasingly value meaningful and slow travel experiences, gastronomy serves as both a functional and symbolic motivator of travel. Hence, understanding how gastronomic tourism affects the perceived attractiveness of a destination is crucial for formulating policies that foster sustainable tourism development [7].

This study aims to investigate the role of gastronomic tourism as an innovative strategy to increase the attractiveness of tourist destinations. It contributes to the academic discourse by offering a conceptual and

empirical framework that connects culinary experiences with destination image and tourist behavioral intentions. Theoretically, this study enhances our understanding of destination attractiveness within the context of experiential tourism. Empirically, it provides tourism stakeholders with actionable insights to design more engaging, localized, and sustainable tourism strategies.

Research on destination attractiveness has traditionally emphasized physical, functional, and service related attributes such as infrastructure, accessibility, safety, and accommodation. While these factors remain important, the evolving preferences of modern tourists have shifted attention toward experiential components particularly cultural and gastronomic experiences [8]. However, a clear theoretical and empirical link between gastronomy and destination attractiveness is still underdeveloped. Many studies have examined gastronomic tourism in isolation, focusing on tourist satisfaction, food image, or culinary motivation, but few have explored how culinary experiences shape tourists' perceptions of the overall attractiveness of a destination. Furthermore, in the context of emerging or less prominent tourist destinations, research remains scarce on how gastronomic elements can be strategically utilized to enhance destination competitiveness and differentiation [9].

Moreover, most existing studies are concentrated in well established culinary destinations such as France, Spain, or Japan, where gastronomy is already deeply integrated into tourism policy [10]. As a result, there is a significant gap in understanding how less developed or non traditional gastronomic destinations particularly in Southeast Asia and similar regions can leverage food based experiences to attract tourists. In addition, few studies provide comprehensive frameworks that connect gastronomic experiences with destination image, emotional engagement, and behavioral intentions, leaving a theoretical void in the integration of experiential and affective dimensions of tourism, [11]. This indicates a need for research that not only recognizes gastronomy as a standalone attraction but also positions it as a strategic driver of destination appeal and sustainability.

## **2. Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review method to explore and analyze the role of gastronomic tourism as an innovative strategy for enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables a deeper and more interpretive understanding of complex socio cultural phenomena such as culinary experiences within the tourism context. The literature review method is suitable for identifying theoretical frameworks, conceptual linkages, and empirical insights by synthesizing findings from previous research [12].

The object of this study centers on the concepts of destination attractiveness and gastronomic tourism as

components of experiential tourism. Data were collected through a systematic review of scholarly sources, including peer reviewed journals, academic books, and relevant policy documents published from 2020 onwards. The study analyzed contributions from various disciplines such as tourism studies, cultural studies, marketing, and hospitality management to develop a comprehensive framework that links culinary experience with tourists' emotional engagement and destination image [13].

The literature reviewed was selected using defined inclusion criteria such as publication date (post-2020), relevance to the research questions, and methodological rigor. Sources were retrieved from academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. Thematic coding and content analysis were applied to extract key patterns and relationships that inform the theoretical positioning of gastronomy within tourism strategy development. This method ensures a robust and contextually grounded understanding of how food based experiences influence tourist perceptions and behavior in emerging destinations.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using a systematic literature review (SLR) method. The primary objective is to investigate the role of gastronomic tourism as an innovative strategy to enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations by synthesizing existing theoretical and empirical research. This qualitative design is particularly appropriate for exploring complex socio cultural phenomena such as experiential travel and culinary tourism, which require interpretive depth and contextual understanding. The study does not involve primary data collection through surveys or interviews but rather focuses on secondary data derived from reputable academic literature and policy documents.

The data for this study were obtained from peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, and policy reports published between 2020 and 2024. Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect were used to retrieve relevant literature. Keywords included gastronomic tourism, destination attractiveness, culinary experience, and experiential tourism. Literature selection followed a three stage process: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. Inclusion criteria consisted of topical relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to theoretical development in tourism and hospitality studies.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This technique involves systematically coding the literature to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and categories relevant to the research objectives. The analysis process included initial familiarization with the data, manual coding of key ideas, theme generation, and synthesis of findings. This method supports the development of a conceptual framework linking gastronomic experiences to tourists' perceptions of destination image, emotional engagement, and behavioral intention.

### 3. Result and Discussion

This study reveals that gastronomy holds significant potential as an innovative strategy to enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations. Through a qualitative approach employing a systematic literature review, the authors identified that local culinary experiences can substantially shape tourists' perceptions of destination image and their behavioral intentions, including revisit interest and recommendation likelihood. The findings are derived from the analysis of peer reviewed literature focusing on how food related activities such as tasting, storytelling, cooking, and market visits offer not only sensory satisfaction but also emotional engagement. These gastronomic elements were found to establish a deeper connection between tourists and local culture, contributing to a more memorable and distinctive travel experience. Thus, gastronomy is positioned not merely as a consumable product, but as a medium for enhancing destination image and fostering competitive differentiation.

The study further highlights the strategic importance of integrating gastronomic experiences into destination development policies, especially in regions lacking global culinary recognition. From the reviewed literature, countries such as Spain, Japan, and Thailand have successfully incorporated gastronomy into their national tourism strategies. However, there remains a considerable gap in implementation across emerging Southeast Asian destinations, including Indonesia. The authors argue that stakeholders must view culinary heritage not as a supplementary attraction but as a central component in designing immersive, authentic, and sustainable tourism experiences. Food tourism can strengthen local identity, contribute to cultural preservation, and stimulate local economies by promoting indigenous cuisines and traditions. This potential underlines the need for deliberate planning and policy alignment to maximize gastronomy's role in destination marketing and development.

Gastronomic elements have become crucial in shaping a destination's image, as they serve not only as sensory experiences but also as cultural narratives that tourists associate with place identity. Destinations that emphasize local culinary heritage in their tourism strategy enhance memorability and differentiation, especially in markets saturated with similar attractions. Food, as a cultural artifact, enables tourists to experience intangible values of the destination, contributing to the formation of a positive and authentic image [14]. As notes, tourists now seek immersive experiences that align with personal interests and values. Gastronomy facilitates this by allowing engagement through taste, storytelling, and interaction with local communities. Culinary branding, when integrated into destination marketing, positions local food as a symbolic marker of culture. For emerging destinations, this represents a strategic tool for market positioning and long term branding that is both emotionally resonant and economically sustainable.

Table 1. Gastronomic Elements Shaping Destination Image

Gastronomic Element	Contribution to Destination Image
Traditional Dishes	Represent cultural identity and authenticity
Culinary Storytelling	Strengthen emotional and historical connections
Cooking Techniques	Highlight uniqueness and traditional knowledge
Local Ingredients	Reflect environmental and regional specificity

Table 1 outlines four key gastronomic components that significantly influence the shaping of a destination's image: traditional dishes, culinary storytelling, cooking techniques, and local ingredients. Each element functions not merely as a source of physical nourishment but as a medium of cultural communication. Traditional dishes, for instance, embody the heritage and identity of a community, offering tourists an authentic taste of local life. Culinary storytelling often embedded in menus, food festivals, or guided tours enriches the experience by connecting food to history, myths, and social customs. This narrative approach deepens emotional engagement and enhances the memorability of the destination. Meanwhile, traditional cooking techniques serve to highlight regional distinctiveness, showcasing craftsmanship and local knowledge passed down through generations. Lastly, the use of local ingredients reflects not only the ecological identity of the region but also supports sustainability and community based economies.

Together, these gastronomic elements contribute to constructing a distinctive and meaningful destination image that appeals to experience driven travelers. They also align with the growing demand for authenticity in tourism, where visitors seek immersive, localized experiences that differentiate one destination from another. By strategically leveraging these culinary components, destinations particularly those in developing regions can strengthen their brand positioning and foster long-term tourist loyalty. As shown in recent studies, such integration between food culture and tourism not only improves economic value but also reinforces the intangible heritage of the host community [15].

Culinary tourism stimulates emotional engagement through multisensory participation, such as tasting, smelling, and storytelling. These experiences create affective bonds between tourists and destinations, reinforcing positive memories and emotional attachment [16]. Activities like cooking classes, food markets, or dining with locals foster personal interaction, which is central to the affective dimension of tourist experiences. According to experiential tourism theory, the emotional intensity of food experiences influences tourist behavior, including satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions. Destinations that promote participatory gastronomic activities build stronger psychological ties with tourists, enhancing perceived authenticity and meaningfulness. Emotional engagement, therefore, is not a by product but a key

outcome of culinary tourism that contributes directly to destination appeal.

Table 2. Activities Triggering Emotional Engagement in Gastronomic Tourism

Activity	Emotional Impact
Cooking Class	Hands-on participation; sense of achievement
Food Festival	Festive and communal atmosphere
Local Dining Experience	Intimacy and empathy with local culture
Market Visit	Sense of discovery and sensory richness

Table 2 presents four culinary activities that effectively foster emotional engagement in gastronomic tourism: cooking classes, food festivals, local dining experiences, and market visits. These activities are not merely recreational but serve as immersive cultural encounters that stimulate multiple senses taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing. Cooking classes, for instance, allow tourists to directly interact with local chefs and ingredients, creating a hands on learning experience that evokes feelings of creativity, achievement, and cultural curiosity. Similarly, food festivals offer an emotionally rich atmosphere, blending communal joy, celebration, and cultural pride, which fosters a strong emotional resonance with the local identity.

Local dining experiences and market visits further deepen the tourist's emotional connection by offering intimacy and authenticity. Eating in a local's home or in traditional settings encourages empathy and interpersonal exchange, allowing tourists to experience hospitality as a form of cultural immersion. Visits to traditional markets introduce elements of surprise and discovery, often associated with nostalgia and sensory pleasure. According such emotionally charged interactions are central to experiential tourism, where the affective dimension becomes a critical driver of satisfaction and loyalty. These activities not only fulfill hedonic needs but also help forge lasting emotional bonds between the tourist and the destination, enhancing the likelihood of revisit intentions and word of mouth promotion [17].

Strategic integration of gastronomy into tourism policy is evident in leading destinations such as Japan and Spain, where culinary heritage is formally recognized and promoted through national campaigns and cultural diplomacy [18]. For instance, Japan's recognition of *washoku* by UNESCO has not only preserved traditional cuisine but also attracted culinary tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. In contrast, emerging destinations often lack coherent policy frameworks to support gastronomic tourism. Indonesia, despite its rich culinary diversity, still treats food as a supplementary rather than central attraction. Policy efforts should focus on supporting local food entrepreneurs, building culinary infrastructure, and incorporating gastronomy into tourism branding. A coordinated, multi stakeholder approach is essential to unlock the full potential of food tourism in national economic and cultural development.

Table 3. Examples of Policy Integration in Gastronomic Tourism

Country	Policy Instrument
Japan	UNESCO recognition of <i>Washoku</i> ; national culinary branding strategy
Spain	Strategic culinary routes and gastronomic festivals
Peru	Culinary diplomacy through promotion of national cuisine
South Korea	National master plan for culinary tourism development

Table 3 highlights four countries Japan, Spain, Peru, and South Korea that have successfully integrated gastronomy into their national tourism policies through strategic instruments. These examples demonstrate how culinary heritage, when formally recognized and supported by policy, can serve as a core pillar of destination branding and economic development. In Japan, the recognition of *washoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine) by UNESCO has elevated food to a symbol of national identity, supported by government led campaigns that link culinary traditions with tourism promotion. Similarly, Spain has institutionalized culinary tourism through gastronomic routes, regional festivals, and Michelin guide integration, reinforcing its image as a premier destination for food lovers.

Peru's strategy focuses on culinary diplomacy, where national cuisine is used as a tool for international cultural outreach and tourism growth. The government actively promotes Peruvian chefs and dishes as ambassadors of cultural identity, thereby strengthening the country's global appeal. South Korea, meanwhile, has developed a national master plan for culinary tourism that aligns food experiences with its broader Hallyu (Korean Wave) strategy, enhancing cross sectoral synergy. These policy instruments illustrate that successful gastronomic tourism requires coordinated action across ministries, tourism boards, and local stakeholders. For emerging destinations, these cases provide a blueprint for how food can transition from a passive attraction to a proactive driver of destination competitiveness, identity preservation, and inclusive economic development [19].

The development of gastronomic tourism in emerging regions is hindered by fragmented efforts, limited institutional support, and overrepresentation of urban, elite cuisine. Rural and indigenous food traditions remain underexplored despite their potential to offer unique and authentic experiences. This imbalance creates challenges for inclusive tourism development and cultural sustainability. Furthermore, current literature is heavily skewed toward established destinations, leaving a gap in empirical research on Southeast Asian countries. Studies are needed to evaluate the economic, social, and cultural impacts of food tourism in contexts like Indonesia. Understanding how local culinary practices can be mobilized without commodification is essential for sustainable destination management and for building a culturally grounded tourism strategy [20].



Table 4. Challenges and Research Gaps in Emerging Destinations

Challenge	Description
Urban Bias	Focus on urban/elite gastronomy overshadows rural culinary traditions
Lack of Policy Integration	Gastronomy is not embedded in tourism planning strategies
Limited Local Capacity	Local communities lack infrastructure and institutional support
Data Scarcity	Few empirical studies in Southeast Asian destinations

Table 4 identifies four major challenges and research gaps that constrain the growth of gastronomic tourism in emerging destinations: urban bias, lack of policy integration, limited local capacity, and data scarcity. Urban bias refers to the overemphasis on metropolitan and elite culinary experiences, which often marginalizes the rich food traditions of rural and indigenous communities. This selective representation creates an imbalanced narrative that undermines the cultural diversity and inclusivity of the destination. Similarly, the absence of integrated policies means that gastronomic tourism is often fragmented and underprioritized in national tourism planning. Without formal strategies, food related initiatives tend to remain informal, short lived, or disconnected from broader tourism objectives.

Limited local capacity further hampers development efforts, as many communities lack the infrastructure, training, or institutional support needed to commercialize their culinary assets. This can result in missed opportunities for local economic empowerment and cultural preservation. In addition, data scarcity remains a critical barrier. There is a notable lack of empirical studies, particularly in Southeast Asia, that evaluate the socio economic impacts of culinary tourism or assess tourist motivations and behaviors in food oriented travel. As argue, the academic discourse on gastronomic tourism is disproportionately concentrated in developed countries, leaving significant contextual gaps in developing regions. Addressing these challenges requires multi level interventions, including policy reform, stakeholder training, and rigorous field based research to inform sustainable and inclusive culinary tourism models.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that gastronomic tourism serves as a powerful and innovative strategy for enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations. Through a systematic literature review, it has been demonstrated that culinary experiences significantly influence tourists' perceptions, emotional engagement, and behavioral intentions. Elements such as traditional food, cultural storytelling, cooking activities, and local ingredients contribute not only to sensory pleasure but also to the formation of a distinctive destination image rooted in authenticity and cultural identity. The implications of this study highlight the need for policymakers and tourism stakeholders particularly in emerging destinations to integrate gastronomy into broader tourism development frameworks. Culinary

tourism offers opportunities for cultural preservation, local economic development, and competitive differentiation. However, challenges such as policy fragmentation, limited local capacity, and lack of empirical research in Southeast Asia must be addressed. Future studies are recommended to explore the direct impacts of gastronomic tourism through field based data collection and to develop inclusive strategies that empower local communities while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the academic staff of the Faculty of Tourism, Universitas Udayana, for their valuable insights during the research development. Special thanks are also extended to the reviewers and editors of *Jurnal Informatika Ekonomi Bisnis* for their constructive feedback and guidance. This study did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not for profit sectors.

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