

THE INFLUENCE OF CULINARY PRODUCT UNIQUENESS ON TOURISTS' FOOD PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Culinary tourism has become an important component of the contemporary tourism experience, as tourists increasingly seek authentic, memorable, and distinctive food experiences at destinations. This study examines the influence of culinary product uniqueness on tourists' food preferences. Culinary product uniqueness refers to the distinctive characteristics of local food, including traditional ingredients, unique flavors, indigenous preparation techniques, cultural authenticity, attractive presentation, and regional identity. The study focuses on how these characteristics shape tourists' willingness to select, consume, and recommend local culinary products. A quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional survey design is proposed for collecting data from tourists who have experienced local or traditional foods at tourism destinations. The study considers culinary uniqueness as the independent variable and tourists' food preferences as the dependent variable. Data can be analyzed through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression analysis. The study is expected to demonstrate that distinctive culinary characteristics can positively influence tourists' food preferences by creating novelty, cultural connection, sensory satisfaction, and memorable experiences. The findings may provide useful implications for restaurants, local food producers, tourism organizations, and destination marketers seeking to strengthen culinary tourism and promote regional food products. The study concludes that developing authentic and distinctive culinary products, while maintaining taste, quality, hygiene, and cultural integrity, can contribute to tourists' positive food experiences and destination attractiveness.

KEYWORDS: *Culinary Tourism, Culinary Product Uniqueness, Tourists' Food Preferences, Local Food, Food Authenticity, Gastronomic Experience, Destination Attractiveness.*

INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism has become an increasingly important component of the contemporary tourism experience because food provides tourists with opportunities to explore the culture, traditions, history, and identity of a destination. Abbasi, A. Z., Fayyaz, M. S., Ting, D. H., Munir, M., Bashir, S., & Zhang, C. (2023).found that Tourists do not consume food only to satisfy physiological needs; they also seek memorable experiences through local dishes, traditional preparation methods, distinctive ingredients, presentation styles, and culturally meaningful eating practices. In this context, the uniqueness of culinary products can play an important role in shaping tourists' food preferences. Culinary product uniqueness refers to the extent to which a food product is perceived as distinctive, unusual, authentic, locally rooted, culturally representative, or different from foods commonly available in the tourist's home environment.Recent tourism research indicates that tourists pay attention to several characteristics of local food when making food-related decisions. A 2024 study of 311 tourists found that taste, quality, authenticity, healthiness, cultural and traditional connections, and environmental friendliness were important attributes in tourists' preferences for local food. The research also demonstrated that tourist preferences are heterogeneous, meaning that different groups of tourists may value different food attributesUniqueness is particularly relevant because tourists often look for experiences that cannot easily be reproduced at home. Research on gastronomic identity has shown that characteristics such as

seasonality can become part of a destination's culinary identity and can be transformed into attractions for visitors. Rachmawati, R., Hidayati, I. N., & Suprayogi, S. (2025). Found that The relationship between culinary uniqueness and tourist preferences is also connected with authenticity. Tourists may perceive a unique food product as more authentic when it is strongly associated with the culture and traditions of the destination. Recent research on local restaurants in Thailand found that perceived authenticity was associated with tourists' subsequent preference for local restaurants and behavioral intentions.

Food neophilia can also strengthen positive responses toward local foods. Research involving ethnic cuisine in Pakistan has further demonstrated the importance of consumption and experiential value in tourists' intentions to consume ethnic food at destinations. The study considered tourists in major Pakistani cities and found that destination image and experiential value were relevant mechanisms linking food experiences with tourism-related intentions. These findings suggest that culinary uniqueness should be considered not merely as a characteristic of a food product but as part of a broader tourist experience. Tourists may differ in their reactions to culinary uniqueness. Some tourists actively seek unfamiliar foods and enjoy experimenting with new tastes, whereas others prefer familiar food because of concerns about ingredients, taste, hygiene, health, or cultural differences. Fatima, S. A., un Nisa, M., Sarwar, A., Khalique, M. A., Arsalan, Z., Noor, S., ... & Abid, H. M. U. (2025). explained Recent research on tourist food choices has similarly identified heterogeneous preference groups and found that factors such as price, taste ratings, waiting time, service, and dining environment can influence food choices. Thus, culinary uniqueness may have a positive influence on preferences, but its influence can depend on other characteristics of the food and the individual tourist. The visual and sensory dimensions of culinary products are also important. A food item that looks attractive, smells appealing, tastes distinctive, and is presented in a culturally meaningful way may create a stronger experience than a conventional food item.

Furthermore, culinary uniqueness can contribute to tourists' willingness to pay and destination competitiveness. Research conducted with tourists in Budapest found preferences for traditional or typical local foods and reported above-average willingness to pay for food prepared with local ingredients when tourists viewed it as a unique experience. Consequently, destinations and food businesses can potentially use distinctive culinary products as part of destination marketing, provided that uniqueness is supported by quality, authenticity, hygiene, accessibility, and appropriate pricing. Despite increasing research on culinary tourism, there remains a need to examine culinary product uniqueness specifically as a determinant of tourists' food preferences. Many studies examine authenticity, taste, quality, local-food consumption, destination image, or experiential value separately. Studying uniqueness directly can provide a clearer understanding of whether distinctive culinary characteristics encourage tourists to select, try, recommend, or prefer local foods. Therefore, the present study focuses on the influence of culinary product uniqueness on tourists' food preferences and seeks to provide empirical insight for tourism destinations, restaurants, local food producers, and destination marketing organizations. Below is a long, research-article-style introduction for your topic, written in formal academic English with recent research support. Culinary tourism has emerged as an increasingly significant dimension of the contemporary tourism industry, as food is no longer considered merely a basic necessity but has become an important component of the overall tourist experience. Tourists frequently use

food as a means of discovering the culture, traditions, history, identity, and lifestyle of a destination. Local dishes, traditional recipes, indigenous ingredients, regional cooking techniques, and culturally meaningful eating practices can provide visitors with experiences that differ from those available in their everyday environments.

A culinary product may be considered unique when tourists perceive it as strongly connected to the destination and different from foods that are commonly available in their home environment. In tourism settings, such uniqueness can generate curiosity and encourage tourists to explore unfamiliar culinary experiences. Consequently, understanding culinary uniqueness is important for explaining why tourists prefer certain local foods over standardized or internationally familiar alternatives. Food has a strong relationship with place and cultural identity. Every destination possesses particular culinary traditions that have developed through its history, geography, climate, agriculture, social practices, and cultural interactions. These traditions can distinguish one destination from another and provide tourists with opportunities to understand local communities through food. Traditional food can communicate stories about a region and its people, while cooking methods and ingredients can represent cultural knowledge transmitted between generations. Therefore, culinary products can function as cultural resources as well as tourism products. When tourists perceive local food as unique and culturally representative, they may develop stronger interest in experiencing that food during their visit. The growing importance of culinary experiences is also associated with tourists' increasing desire for authenticity and meaningful experiences. Contemporary tourists often seek experiences that are different from standardized tourism products. Rather than simply visiting attractions and taking photographs, many tourists want to interact with local culture through activities such as visiting food markets, eating traditional dishes, participating in cooking experiences, and learning about local ingredients.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of perceived authenticity in tourists' experiences with local restaurants and culinary products. When tourists perceive food as authentic, culturally meaningful, and connected with local traditions, this perception can influence their attitudes and subsequent behavioral intentions. The sensory characteristics of food also contribute to tourists' perceptions of uniqueness. Dechakul, M., & Monpanthong, P. (2024). explains Taste, aroma, texture, color, appearance, and presentation can make a culinary product distinctive and memorable. Tourists may be attracted to foods that offer flavors and sensory experiences that they cannot easily obtain in their home locations. For example, a traditional dish prepared with regional spices or an indigenous ingredient may provide a distinctive taste experience. Similarly, attractive presentation may increase tourists' curiosity and willingness to try a local product. Thus, culinary uniqueness is not limited to the ingredients used in food; it can involve the entire sensory and experiential character of the culinary product. Tourists' food preferences are influenced by multiple factors, and uniqueness is only one component of the decision-making process. Taste, price, food quality, hygiene, health considerations, familiarity, cultural values, service quality, availability, and previous experiences can all affect tourists' choices. A unique food product may attract attention, but tourists may not choose it if they perceive it as unsafe, excessively expensive, poor in quality, or unsuitable for their dietary requirements. Therefore, the influence of culinary uniqueness needs to be examined alongside other characteristics that contribute to tourists' perceptions of

value and satisfaction. The concept of novelty is another important factor connecting culinary uniqueness with tourist food preferences.

Food can create associations between a destination and specific cultural characteristics, helping tourists remember the place after their visit. In this sense, culinary products can contribute not only to individual food preferences but also to the broader image and competitiveness of tourism destinations. The relationship between culinary uniqueness and tourist preferences is particularly important for developing destinations with rich cultural and culinary traditions. Many destinations possess traditional foods that have substantial cultural value but may not be sufficiently promoted as tourism products. By identifying the characteristics that tourists perceive as unique and attractive, tourism stakeholders can develop more effective culinary tourism strategies. Local restaurants, food producers, tourism authorities, hotels, and destination marketing organizations can use information about tourist preferences to present traditional foods in ways that maintain cultural authenticity while meeting contemporary expectations concerning quality, hygiene, presentation, and accessibility. Local communities can also benefit from the development of distinctive culinary tourism products. Kovalenko, S., Kovalenko, S., Kutsenko, A., Godlevskyi, M., Severin, V., & Kovalenko, A. (2024) revealed When tourists consume locally produced food, economic benefits may reach farmers, food producers, restaurant owners, market vendors, artisans, and other members of the local community. Culinary tourism can therefore contribute to local economic development and support the preservation of traditional food practices. However, commercialization can also create challenges if traditional foods are excessively modified to satisfy tourists' expectations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the relationship between tourists' perceptions of culinary uniqueness and their intention to choose, consume, and recommend local foods.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does perceived culinary uniqueness affect tourists' intention to choose, consume, and recommend local foods?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary product uniqueness refers to the distinctive characteristics that differentiate one food product from other foods available to tourists. These characteristics may include unique ingredients, traditional recipes, regional preparation techniques, cultural symbolism, distinctive flavors, presentation, seasonality, and geographical association. In tourism, uniqueness is particularly significant because visitors often seek experiences that are different from their everyday lives. Local food can provide a destination with a distinctive identity because food is closely connected with place and culture. Research on gastronomic destination development emphasizes quality, authenticity, and diversity as important components of destination gastronomy. Local cuisine can contribute to regional identity and provide sensory experiences through which tourists develop perceptions of a destination. Authenticity is closely related to culinary uniqueness. Moreno-Lobato, A. (2026).

elaboraedt A food product can be considered unique when tourists perceive it as genuinely connected to the traditions and culture of the destination. Tourists may therefore prefer foods that appear traditional rather than standardized or commercially adapted.A 2025 study of tourists and local restaurants found a significant relationship between perceived authenticity and tourist-related behavioral outcomes, with self-expansion acting as an important mechanism connecting authenticity with local restaurant preferencehis suggests that authentic and distinctive culinary experiences can become meaningful components of tourists' consumption decisions.Although uniqueness is important, tourists rarely evaluate food on uniqueness alone. Taste and quality remain fundamental determinants of food preference. The 2024 Best-Worst Scaling study of 311 tourists found that taste and quality were among the most strongly prioritized local-food attributes, alongside authenticity, healthiness, cultural connection, and environmental.

Culinary products provide experiential value through taste, smell, appearance, atmosphere, social interaction, and cultural learning. When food is perceived as unique, tourists may regard the consumption experience as more memorable.Research on ethnic cuisine has shown that experiential and consumption values can influence tourists' intentions to consume food at destinations. This supports the idea that tourists' food preferences are influenced not only by the physical characteristics of food but also by the experiences associated with consuming it.Tourists differ in their willingness to try unfamiliar foods. Food neophilic tourists are more willing to experiment with new culinary products, whereas food-neophobic tourists may avoid unfamiliar foods. Research in Pakistan found that food neophilia strengthened positive responses toward local food, while food neophobia weakened the relationship between favorable attitudes and intentions to try local food.Consequently, culinary uniqueness may have a stronger influence on tourists who actively seek novelty and new food experiencesUnique food can become an important component of destination image. Tourists may associate a particular destination with specific dishes, ingredients, cooking techniques, or food traditions. In this way, culinary uniqueness can help distinguish destinations from competitors.Research published in 2024 demonstrated that local-food consumption and experiential values contribute to food-destination attractiveness and food-destination image. Thus, promoting unique culinary products may contribute to both individual food preferences and broader destination perceptions.

When tourists believe that a food product represents the genuine culinary culture of a destination, they may develop greater curiosity and willingness to try it. In this context, uniqueness strengthens the perceived authenticity of culinary products because distinctive food characteristics can communicate that the product is genuinely associated with a particular place and culture.Another important factor discussed in the literature is local food identity. Culinary products can function as cultural symbols because they often represent the history, lifestyle, beliefs, and social practices of local communities. A destination's cuisine may distinguish it from competing destinations and provide tourists with an opportunity to experience something that is unavailable in their home environment. Unique culinary products can consequently contribute to destination differentiation. For example, traditional foods prepared with locally available ingredients may become recognizable representations of a destination. Kovalenko, S., Kovalenko, S., Kutsenko, A., Godlevskyi, M., Severin, V., & Kovalenko, A. (2024, explained Tourists who are interested in cultural exploration may therefore prefer foods that have a clear connection with local identity. The stronger the

perceived relationship between the culinary product and the destination, the greater the possibility that tourists will consider the food an important part of their travel experience. The literature also emphasizes the importance of sensory characteristics in determining food preferences. Taste, aroma, texture, appearance, temperature, and presentation can influence tourists' evaluations of local culinary products. A unique food product may attract tourists because of its distinctive sensory characteristics.

Therefore, uniqueness is not limited to the ingredients used in a culinary product; it can also involve the overall sensory experience associated with consuming the food. Memorable tourism experiences provide another theoretical perspective for understanding the relationship between culinary uniqueness and tourist preferences. Rachmawati, R., Hidayati, I. N., & Suprayogi, S. (2025) found that Food experiences can become an important part of tourists' memories of a destination. When a culinary product provides something distinctive, culturally meaningful, and enjoyable, it may become more memorable than an ordinary meal. Tourists may subsequently associate the unique food with the destination itself. Memorable culinary experiences can influence satisfaction and may contribute to tourists' intentions to revisit a destination or recommend it to others. Consequently, culinary product uniqueness may have effects that extend beyond the immediate food choice by contributing to broader destination experiences. Cultural curiosity can further explain why tourists are attracted to distinctive culinary products. Travelers frequently use food as a way to learn about the people and traditions of a destination. Local dishes can provide information about agricultural practices, religious traditions, historical influences, migration, and community lifestyles. Wang, X., Zhang, X., Luo, Z., Sun, Q., Cui, Y., Wang, J., ... & Wang, Z. (2024). found that A unique culinary product may therefore encourage tourists to ask questions about its ingredients, history, preparation, and cultural significance. This interaction can make the food experience more meaningful. Tourists with stronger cultural curiosity may demonstrate greater interest in distinctive local foods because they view eating as a form of cultural exploration rather than simply a routine activity.

METHODOLOGY

The study will employ a quantitative research approach. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the purpose of the study is to measure tourists' perceptions of culinary product uniqueness and determine its statistical relationship with their food preferences. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire. Respondents will be asked to evaluate statements related to culinary uniqueness, authenticity, traditional ingredients, distinctive taste, presentation, cultural value, and their own food preferences. A five-point Likert scale can be used, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This approach will allow researchers to convert tourists' perceptions into measurable variables and statistically examine relationships between them. The methodology of this study is designed to systematically examine the influence of culinary product uniqueness on tourist food preferences. The study focuses on understanding how distinctive characteristics of culinary products, including unique ingredients, traditional preparation methods, taste, presentation, cultural authenticity, local identity, and originality, influence tourists' preferences for local food. Since the research aims to examine the relationship between measurable variables, a quantitative research methodology is considered appropriate. The methodology provides a structured framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data

from tourists and allows the researcher to identify patterns and relationships between culinary product uniqueness and tourist food preferences. The methodology of this study is designed to systematically examine the influence of culinary product uniqueness on tourist food preferences. The study focuses on understanding how distinctive characteristics of culinary products, including unique ingredients, traditional preparation methods, taste, presentation, cultural authenticity, local identity, and originality, influence tourists' preferences for local food.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study will use a cross-sectional survey research design. Data will be collected from tourists at selected tourism destinations, restaurants, food streets, cultural sites, and other locations where tourists experience local culinary products. The target population will consist of domestic and international tourists who have consumed or experienced local/traditional foods at a tourist destination. A sample of approximately 250–400 tourists may be selected depending on available resources and the scope of the study. Purposive sampling can be used to ensure that participants have actual experience with local culinary products. The study employs a cross-sectional descriptive and correlational research design. The descriptive component is used to describe tourists' perceptions regarding the uniqueness of culinary products and their preferences for local foods. The correlational component is used to examine the relationship between culinary product uniqueness and tourist food preferences. Data are collected from respondents at a particular period rather than following the same participants over an extended period. The cross-sectional design is appropriate because the research aims to obtain a current picture of tourists' food-related perceptions and preferences. Participants are asked to evaluate their experiences and perceptions of local culinary products based on their tourism experiences. The design allows the researcher to collect information efficiently and compare responses across different groups of tourists. Although the design can identify associations between variables, it does not by itself establish definite causal relationships. Therefore, findings are interpreted in terms of relationships and influence supported by the statistical analysis rather than claiming experimental causation. The population of the study consists of tourists who have experienced or consumed local culinary products at the selected tourism destination.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical software such as PSS. First, descriptive statistics will be used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and their responses. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations will be calculated. Second, the reliability of the questionnaire will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A satisfactory reliability coefficient will indicate that the items used to measure the study variables are internally consistent. Third, correlation analysis will be conducted to determine the relationship between culinary product uniqueness and tourists' food preferences. Finally, linear regression analysis can be used to examine whether culinary product uniqueness significantly predicts tourists' food preferences. If the study includes several dimensions of uniqueness, such as distinctive taste, traditional ingredients, cultural authenticity, presentation, and preparation methods, multiple regression can be used to determine their individual contributions. The proposed conceptual relationship is: Culinary

Product Uniqueness → Tourists' Food Preferences Possible dimensions include: Unique Ingredients + Traditional Preparation + Distinctive Taste + Cultural Authenticity + Attractive Presentation → Food Preference The collected data are entered into statistical software such as SPSS for analysis. Data cleaning is conducted before the main statistical analysis. The researcher checks the dataset for missing values, duplicate responses, invalid responses, and possible data-entry errors. Descriptive statistics are initially used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Frequencies and percentages can be calculated for categorical variables such as gender, nationality, education level, and travel purpose. Means and standard deviations can be calculated for major research variables and questionnaire dimensions.

FINDINGS

Because no actual questionnaire dataset has been provided, the following findings are presented as proposed/expected findings, not as claimed statistical results. The study is expected to show that tourists perceive unique culinary products more positively when these foods contain distinctive local ingredients and traditional preparation methods. Culinary uniqueness is expected to have a positive relationship with tourists' food preferences. Tourists may demonstrate greater willingness to select foods that provide experiences unavailable in their ordinary environment. Authenticity and cultural connection are expected to be important components of perceived uniqueness. Tourists may prefer foods that represent the traditions, history, and identity of the destination. Taste and quality are expected to remain important alongside uniqueness. A food product may be highly distinctive, but tourists' preference may remain limited if they perceive its taste or quality negatively. This expectation is consistent with recent research showing the strong importance of taste and quality in tourist local-food preferences. The study is expected to find that tourists who enjoy trying unfamiliar foods demonstrate stronger interest in unique culinary products. Previous research supports the importance of food neophilia in tourists' responses to local food. Unique culinary products may also influence tourists' intentions to recommend local food to others and revisit food destinations. Research on local culinary tourism indicates that memorable culinary experiences and destination image can contribute to revisit intention.

CONCLUSION

Culinary product uniqueness represents an important dimension of tourists' food experiences. In tourism destinations, food can function as more than a basic necessity because it provides visitors with opportunities to experience local culture, traditions, identity, and place. Distinctive ingredients, traditional preparation methods, regional flavors, cultural meanings, and attractive presentation can make culinary products memorable and differentiate them from foods available in tourists' home environments. The literature indicates that tourists consider several attributes when selecting local food, including taste, quality, authenticity, healthiness, cultural connection, and environmental characteristics. Therefore, culinary uniqueness should be considered as part of a broader value proposition rather than as an isolated characteristic. Authenticity is particularly important because tourists may interpret unique food as a representation of local culture. When culinary products are genuinely connected with regional traditions, they can contribute to meaningful tourist experiences and strengthen tourists' relationships with the destination. The influence of uniqueness may also

differ among tourists. Tourists who enjoy novelty and unfamiliar foods may be particularly attracted to distinctive culinary products, whereas tourists with stronger food-neophobic tendencies may prefer familiar dishes. This variation suggests that food businesses and tourism organizations should understand the different preferences of their target tourist groups. For destinations, developing and promoting unique culinary products can contribute to destination differentiation. However, uniqueness should be supported by appropriate taste, quality, hygiene, authenticity, reasonable pricing, and accessibility.

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