

Local Food Consumption and Travelling Experience among Domestic Tourists

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.809086>

Received: 03 September 2024; Accepted: 05 September 2024; Published: 04 October 2024

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between local food consumption and domestic tourists' travelling experience. A quantitative research approach was employed through self-administrated questionnaire distribution to 200 Malaysian domestic tourists who have visited Ipoh, Perak, in West Malaysia. Frequency and multiple regression analyses were performed using the SPSS software. Results revealed that local food quality, pricing, access, verities, and historical and cultural values strongly influence Malaysian domestic tourists to consume local food in Ipoh, Perak. The study contributes to the theoretical aspect, particularly tourist behavior within the local food and tourism study. This study advises future researchers perform comparable investigations in various geographical settings.

Keywords: destination; domestic tourist; local food; food consumption; travelling pattern

INTRODUCTION

As one of a region's unique resources that attract tourists in a competitive tourism market, local food has been utilized by many tourism destinations [1]. It can serve as both a tourist attraction and an image-maker for the tourism destination [2, 3, 4]. Tourists are increasingly likely to consume local food in the regions where it is produced. Thus, the local economy can be strengthened by local food, which is a significant factor in attracting tourists, and the sustainability of regional tourism can be ensured through the creation of food related employment opportunities.

In terms of socio-cultural benefits, place dishes and food products specialties may have favorable effects on local people's sense of cultural belonging, just as it may enhance tourists' understanding of the visited tourism destination [3, 5]. Local food offers something more symbolic than merely nutritional value. Food can be used to communicate and share information about the status and culture of a person, a community, and/or a region. In other words, the consumption of local food enhances tourists' comprehension of human (i.e., social relationships and cultural practices) at a particular tourism destination [6]. In a similar notion, local food can play a significant role in the development of sustainable tourism because it can satisfy a variety of complex demands, including local community desires to support local food producers and food businesses, as well as tourist demands for food products that seem to reflect a destination's identity and culture value. Through the consumption of local food, which is seen as a component of sustainable tourism [8], host communities of a particular tourism destination should be supported, business profitability should be increased, and tourist satisfaction should be guaranteed [9].

The consumption of local food is generally recognized as one of the essential elements of the tourist experience [10]. Although local food is considered only to appease hunger for some tourists, it also serves as an important

part of travel for some other tourists who are motivated to experience different tastes. Tourists' desire to learn more about the origins of food and their inclination to experience food in person by witnessing the production steps are among the reasons driving interest in local foods [11]. Local food in tourism destinations is considered attractive by tourists because it is different from everyday food and meals, thus increasing the propensity to spend more money. In this sense, local food is seen as a useful tool for developing destinations and achieving sustainable tourism experiences [8]. Additionally, unique local food experiences at a destination not only attract many tourists but also help to enhance the destination's identity and image. Place identity and availability of food choice (i.e., information related diet restriction especially religious dietary requirement such as Halal and Kosher food) have also significantly contributed to tourist motivation to travel to a tourism destination [12, 13].

In the case of Malaysia, a limited number of studies on the impact of local foods on tourism especially examining domestic tourist food behaviors, are found by reviewing the Malaysian literature. Problems with the availability of local food, particularly in a multicultural destination like Ipoh, Perak, which located in Northern Region of West Malaysia are compelling restaurant owners and food service providers to introduce some originality [14]. This becomes more serious when outsiders (in this study refers to domestic tourists) struggling to learn about the local food without a clear understanding on the concept and characteristics as well as its role in enhancing tourists travelling experience. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between local food consumption and travelling pattern based on the personal experiences of Malaysian domestic tourists who have visited local food places and attractions around Ipoh, Perak [7].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consuming local food, which is a crucial component of the travel experience, offers entertainment and chances to discover the local culture [15]. Local food experiences for tourists include wine and food tasting events, cooking classes, and food and wine pairing demonstrations [16]. Local food includes all food types: fruit, meat, milk, preserves, wine and beer, confectionery, or pastries [10]. Farm shops, farmers' markets, independent butchers, bakers, and artisan food outlets also offer travellers the chance to buy local produce [17].

The definition of local food also includes regional specialities and food that is made using regional ingredients, suggesting the production method, and highlighting the value of regional ingredients. The term "terroir" is also inextricably linked to their region and get their distinctive qualities from the nature of land and soil, the technical character of the dishes, and organisational traits of the place they are produced [18].

Although tourists have the chance to interact with local cuisine through tourism [19], the definition of what constitutes 'local' is controversial and subject to debate on both a conceptual and spatial level. Although the terms "local" and "regional" food are frequently used interchangeably, there is disagreement over what they mean, according to [20]. However, a crucial factor in identifying local food is the geographic proximity of the production and consumption areas [21]. Local food enhances the reputation of a tourist site as a resource [22]. It draws more tourists to the area, promoting regional diversification and development [23]. Therefore, tourism allows local food producers to expand their product lines or target new consumers.

Despite this importance, few studies have examined how local food is used as a central component of tourism to inform and communicate about a place or destination, and how the role of local food embedded in the destination culture influences various levels of tourists' perceptions and travel experiences. Although some local food specialties have the potential to influence the decisions and behaviours of tourists, additional research is required so that theory and practise regarding local food consumption and tourist behaviour can contribute to the global understanding of other destinations.

A. Tourism Stakeholder Collaboration in Adopting Local Food as Part of Destination Image and Experiences

As previously discussed, even though using local food has proven attractive to tourists and can improve a destination's image, it is crucial to understand local cuisine and its influence on tourism development. Furthermore, incorporating local cuisine knowledge into tourism is helpful because it links to the local identity [24, 25]. The symbiotic relationship between tourism and local food is crucial, mainly to promote that region's emblematic

products and strengthen regional development [26, 27]. This can be done by choosing the right marketing strategies through relevant advertising and promotional vehicles. For example, food and wine trail initiatives are good examples of collaborative efforts and continuous commitment between agriculture and the tourism industry [28]. Food trails, however, require thorough planning, especially when involving policymakers in the marketing process. Further discussion between policymakers and marketers (typically industrial bodies and/or non-government agencies) on the type of tourism product information needed is necessary before committing to final decisions in the form of strategic marketing plans or tourism policies

B. Tourist Experiences and Destination Local Food Consumption

Several studies have found that tourist food consumption is influenced by motivational factors, and local food is of secondary importance to overall trip satisfaction [29]. Tasting local food is enjoyable and thrilling [30]. Physical, cultural, interpersonal, and statute motivations for travellers to consume local food [28]. The dimensions of tourists' food motivation into two primary categories: symbolic dimensions (learning local culture, exciting experience, authenticity, prestige) and obligatory dimensions (health concern, physical need, etc.) [45]. Five senses perceive taste, appearance, aroma, and the authenticity of a location, all of which can be considered physical motivators. Relatedly, taste, flavour, aroma, and visual image of food as physical motivators reflecting sensory allure. Travel is viewed as a means of escape from routine [[31, 32, 33], so travellers prefer to dine in authentic restaurants with a traditional atmosphere over international fast-food chains. Eating local food while travelling is also a form of social and cultural interaction because it provides clues about the local way of life, etiquette, geography, and economy, among other indicators [34].

The traveller who consumes and experiences the local cuisine while visiting a place is mainly responsible for its distinctiveness. Producers of unique food products can put them in the premium pricing range and in-crease their profit margin since customers see them as having a distinctive and superior quality to general ones [44]. Similarly, the distinctiveness of regional cuisine and food products could distinguish one location from another [35]. Additionally, when visiting foreign nations, consumers' perceptions of whether to accept or reject a cuisine are influenced by both the food's features and the tourists' characteristics (physiological, demographic, behavioural, and psychological, as well as travel habits) [27]. In summary, Fig. 1 illustrates the relationship between local food consumption and tourist travelling experiences.

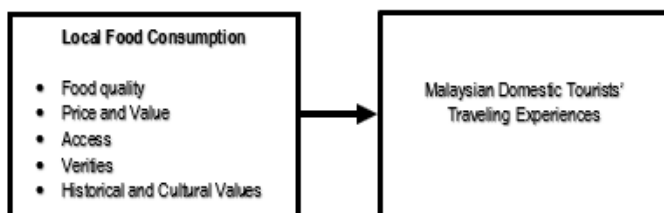


Fig. 1: The relationship between local food consumption and tourist travelling experiences.

(Source: Adopted from [27, 1])

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed in accordance with the correlational research approach (i.e. one of the quantitative research designs). Correlational research aims to determine if there is a relationship between two or more variables and, if so, to show the direction and strength of that relationship [36]. Correlational studies are essential because they precisely understand specific associations in a phenomenon, especially within the human behavioural context [37]. How-ever, these studies do not provide a cause-and-effect relationship. The study tested the model in Figure 1. The sample of the study was determined by the convenience sampling technique. Data were collected at five food and tourism at-tractions in Ipoh, Perak, which has high local food access and availability. Participations in the data collection was voluntary. A sample size of 200 to 500 respondents is considered sufficient to achieve accurate estimation [38], and most research papers can appropriately attain 30 to 500 samples when conducting a quantitative approach [39]. In addition, by employing an effect size of 0.15, a power of 0.80, and predictors of 5, G*Power recommended a minimum sample size of 92 respondents. 200 of

213 questionnaires were declared suitable for data analysis. The study made use of the SPSS statistical analysis software. There were four steps to the analytical procedure. Firstly, the data and inferential analyses encompassing descriptive analysis of the respondent's socio-demographic characteristics were conducted. Next, inferential analysis was employed using Multiple Linear Regression analysis to examine the relationships between five dimensions of local food consumption and domestic tourists travelling.

FINDINGS

This section presented the result of the survey that were collected from randomly distributed and administrated to the potential domestic tourist at Vanggey Restaurant, Ipoh Old Town (Nam Heong Coffee Shop), Plan B, Lost World of Tam-bun, Restaurant Hollywood, Gerbang Malam Ipoh, and Street Art Ipoh.

A. Demographic Social Profile

In this section, demographic profiles of participating respondents (i.e. Malaysian domestic tourists who have visited the selected restaurants in Ipoh, Perak) were collected and analysed using frequency analysis and presented in Table I.

Table I: Data of socio-demographic profile of respondents

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	112	56
Female	88	44
Age:		
18-25	54	27
26-35	56	28
36-45	44	22
46-55	38	19
56 and above	8	4
Level of Education:		
SPM (i.e. secondary/high school)	24	12
Certificate	64	32
Diploma	68	34
Bachelor	40	20
Postgraduate	4	2
Occupation:		
Government Servants	42	21

Private Company	78	39
Self-employed	40	20
Students	40	20
Monthly Income:		
Below MYR1000.00	48	24
MYR1001.00 – MYR5000.00	66	33
MYR5001.00 – MYR10000.00	56	28
MYR10000.00 and above	30	15
Ethnic Group:		
Malay	86	43
Chinese	50	25
Indian	54	27
Others	10	5
Purpose of Travelling:		
Holiday and Leisure	132	66
Business	15	7.5
Visit Relatives	18	9
Educational Trip	27	13.5
Medical Treatment	8	4

Socio-demographic characteristics are summarised to distinguish between groups in Table 4.1. The results showed 112 (56%) male and 88 (44%) fe-male respondents. Frequency results also showed that most respondents were between 26 and 35 years old (28%). This is followed by the age group between 18 and 25 (27%). It was also found that the majority are Diploma holders, with 68 respondents (34%). Table 4.1 highlights that income level between MYR1001.00 and MYR5000.00 was mostly earned by the study's re-spondents. Finally, most respondents were on holiday and leisure (i.e. 132 re-spondents or 66%) compared to other purposes travelling who participated in this study.

B. Relationship between Tourist Perception and Traveling Experiences towards Local Food at Ipoh

Multiple Regression analysis was employed to examine if perception towards food quality, price and value, access, verities, and historical and cultural values of local food in Ipoh significantly predicted Malaysian domestic tourist travelling experiences. Results were summarised and exhibited in Table II and Table III.

Table II: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square (R ²)	Adjusted R Square	Std. an error in the estimate	
1	.773 ^a	.581	.569	5.73226	
ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4112.471	4	1079.131	33.673	.000 ^b
Residual	3086.772	95	33.167		
Total	7199.243	99			

Table III: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised			Standardised
	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	87.788	8.728		0.000
Food quality	3.269	0.000	0.342	0.000
Price and Value	2.531	0.008	0.227	0.000
Access	6.749	0.001	0.549	0.000
Verities	3.374	0.000	0.456	0.000
Historical and Cultural Values	2.353	0.001	0.243	0.000

Table II and III shows the relationship between local food consumption and domestic tourist travelling experience in Ipoh, Perak. The multiple regression model with all five predictors produced R² = .581, F = 33.673, p < .05. As can be seen in Table III, the food quality, price and value, access, verities, and historical and cultural values are significantly influenced by Malaysian domestic tourists travelling experiences during their stay in Ipoh, Perak.

DISCUSSIONS

Findings from this study showed that Malaysian domestic tourists today are more adventurous and open to destination (i.e. local) experiences, with many keen to try what is sold to them as ‘authentic local food’. Providing quality opportunities for tourists to experience local food is essential to ensure overall tourist satisfaction. A large percentage of tourists' time whilst on holiday involves consuming food and beverages or deciding what and where to eat [26]. Many countries and destinations around the world have begun to realise the importance of local cuisine in marketing the destination. Countries that have long been known for their distinctive local food and cuisines include France, Italy, and Spain. Various pasta dishes, including lasagne and ravioli, are synonymous with Italy, for example. Once again, this is consistent with the notion local food contributes to the locality of the destination [19, 26].

The establishment of culinary establishments, such as local restaurants, also promotes local cuisine. This also allows many tourists to become more familiar with all aspects of local cuisine, including its quality and values

[31], and to immerse themselves in the local culture and society. It was also found that tourists will become enthused when they begin comparing and evaluating their food experiences [40, 41]. Tourism products and services always offer distinct sensory experiences, meanings, and motives [41, 42, 43]. Ipoh, Perak cuisine is provided at various dining establishments. In the restaurants, Malaysian domestic travellers were able to observe and learn about historical and cultural values through the names of dishes, food presentation, and eating style (i.e. local eating style). For example, ‘nasi ganja’ (Fig. 2), ‘rendang tok’ (Fig.3), and ‘chee cheong fun’ (Fig.4) as promoted by Tourism Perak, Malaysia [44].

Fig. 2: ‘Nasi ganja’ (i.e., white rice served with fried chicken cooked in cili sauce, squid curry and cucumber pickles)



(Source: Perak Guide Booklet 2024, September 7)

Fig. 3: ‘Rendang tok’ (i.e., beef cooked with coconut milk, chilli paste and local aromatic ingredients)



(Source: Perak Guide Booklet 2024, September 7)

Fig. 4: ‘Chee cheong fun’ (i.e., flat rolled rice noodles served with sweet and savoury chili sauce, sprinkled with white sesame seeds and fried shallots)



(Source: Perak Guide Booklet 2024, September 7)

During their stay in Ipoh, Perak, tourists' perceptions of the local food's price and value have positively impacted their travel experiences. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that tourists who perceive value for money are more likely to have a favourable opinion of the cuisine or restaurant [41, 42]. Due to the use of locally grown ingredients, some tourists may have considered Ipoh, Perak's local cuisine, to be reasonably priced and affordable. Studies even demonstrate that purchasing and consuming non-locally produced food while

travelling is more expensive than purchasing and consuming locally grown and produced food in a particular tourism destination. Most people (including tourist) even believed that local foods were of higher quality than those that were imported.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism destinations, particularly in the case of Ipoh, Perak, that want to turn this situation into an opportunity have created gastronomic products to attract domestic tourists' attention. Food which refers to local food, can be utilised not only as one of the human primaries need sources, but it has, over time, become a motivating factor for domestic tourists to come to a destination. For the development of a destination, it is vital that the destination is aware of its local food concepts and includes them as one of the tourism experiences and specialities. Local food consumption paves the way for a particular destination where relevant stakeholders, including producers and sellers, can continue providing local food as a destination attraction and add value to the tourist travelling experience. In other words, tourist destination should also consider the needs of all stakeholders involved in the production and delivery of local food experiences.

Regarding recommendations for future research efforts, this study suggests that more investigation can be pursued by examining indigenous cuisine in different geographical areas or countries. This research can be further extended by conducting a comparative analysis of gastronomy across two or more places/destinations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the reviewers and the editorial team for reviewing and providing constructive feedback to improve the quality and content of this paper. Although this is an unfunded research project by any stakeholders, the authors would like to express their most profound appreciation to Pembiayaan Yuran Prosiding Berindeks (PYPB), Tabung Dana Kecemerlangan Pendidikan (DKP), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Finally, thanks to the local council of Ipoh, Perak and all domestic tourists who have participated in the survey

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