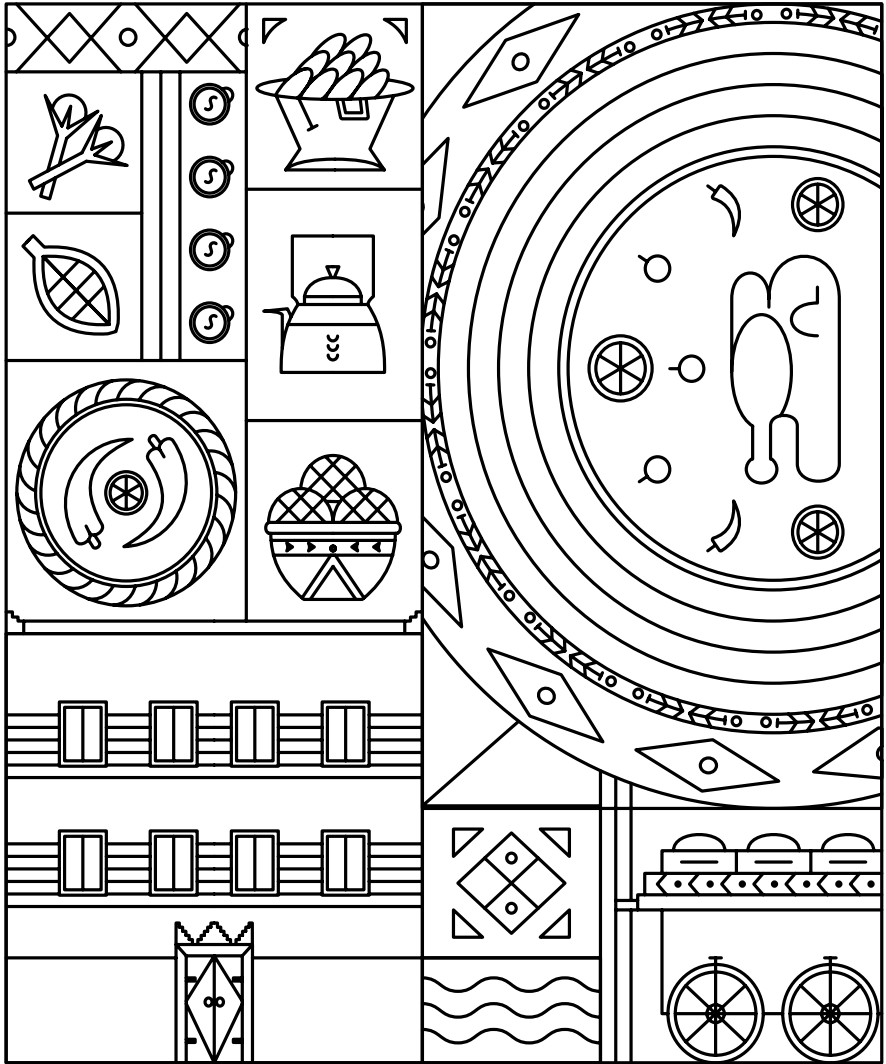


GASTRONOMY TOURISM

EXPERIENCES AND INNOVATION



DR. EMAD MONSHI & DR. FAIZAN ALI

Acknowledgement

Our book, “Gastronomy Tourism: Experiences and Innovation,” illuminates a relatively unexplored facet of the Saudi tourism industry, focusing on the intersection of travel and the culinary arts. This publication is the culmination of a robust collaboration between a diverse group of authors, both from Saudi Arabia and around the globe. Each contributor has brought their unique expertise and perspectives, enriching the book with a tapestry of insights into the world of gastronomy tourism.

As editors, we are immensely grateful to all the authors who have dedicated their time and knowledge to this project. Their harmonious collaboration and valuable contributions have not only enriched the content of the book, but have also helped paint a comprehensive picture of this dynamic sector.

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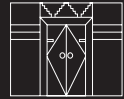
01

Saudi Arabia: Creating a Gastronomic Destination

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The contributions to the volume provide a broad overview of the development of gastronomy tourism, which is one of the most dynamic sectors of global travel. Gastronomy is a particularly useful tool for tourism development and marketing, because as this volume shows, gastronomic experiences provide a vibrant link between local culture and inquisitive tourists, showcasing the lifestyle and identity of Saudi Arabia through the mutual enjoyment of food. The development of gastronomy tourism therefore presents opportunities for the expansion of cultural and experience-based tourism, but at the same time it creates challenges in the maintenance of the authenticity and genuineness of local and regional cuisine.

Tourism Development and Gastronomy in Saudi Arabia

Since Saudi Arabia opened up to international tourism in 2019, there has been a significant boost to tourism and cultural consumption. The Report on the State of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2021 (Ministry of Culture) showed that tourism has made a strong recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic cultural tourism was found to have grown by 30%, driven by a broader trend of increased interest in and appreciation of culture. As many of the contributions to this volume emphasise, the adoption of the Saudi Vision 2030 strategy is driving significant transformations in culture, creativity and tourism. The Saudi Vision 2030 Quality of Life Program aims to enable “culture, entertainment, sports and tourism to flourish in Saudi Arabia, delivering enriched and better lives for all.” (Saudi Vision 2030, 2023)

A key tool in the development of culture under the Saudi Vision 2030 is the organisation of events and festivals, including a wide range of gastronomic festivals throughout the country (Ministry of Culture, 2021). In 2021, the Festival of Dates, organised by the Culinary Arts Commission, attracted around 20,000 visitors. The 2021 Saudi Feast Festival in Jeddah focused on Saudi Arabian cuisine in conjunction with the Red Sea International Film Festival. The event offered a platform for celebrating the Saudi culinary arts and supporting Saudi chefs, both male and female, to present their products and skills. The festival attracted more than 500,000 visitors in 2021 (Ministry of Culture, 2021). Buraidah, the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in the Al Qassim Province in north-central Saudi Arabia, also hosts a number of gastronomic festivals and events. These include the Dates Festival and the Klija and Traditional Food Festival, featuring klija, a crispy cookie filled with molasses, dates and cinnamon. The 12th edition of the event in 2021 recorded an income of about 7 million SAR (\$1.86 million) (Hameed, 2022). Buraidah has over 2,000 businesses operating in the culinary arts field, a large proportion of which are home-based businesses generating \$426 million per year in revenue (UNESCO, 2023). This also underlines the strong link between gastronomy, tourism and the creative industries.

As Emad Monshi underlines in Chapter 2 of this volume, there is a strong link between gastronomy and place in Saudi Arabia, and food traditions provide a foundation for identity and cultural heritage. Many of the chapters in this volume mention the different regional cuisines in the country, which are reflected in food, drink and gastronomic practices. Gastronomy is a cultural practice, which as Bargeman and Richards (2020) illustrate, combines resources, meaning and creativity to develop tourism experiences. Gastronomy is a complex series of practices in which the basic resources (food ingredients) are creatively combined (for example by skilled cooks using local knowledge and recipes) to produce a food product or dish that has meanings related to the local culture, environment and society (Fernandes & Richards, 2021). Food practices develop in a variety of settings. For example, Fahad Alhuqbani in Chapter 3 emphasises the importance of street food in Saudi gastronomy. Street food is important to tourism development because it reflects local culture, uses local ingredients and employs local people. Street food

also differs from one destination to another, adding to the diversity of the tourist experience. Alhuqbani also draws on the experience of other destinations such as Singapore, Egypt, India, Malaysia, and Thailand to show how street food is not just an essential part of local culture, but also a major draw for tourists.

Huthaifah Madkhali outlines in Chapter 6 how the development of fast-food in Saudi Arabia is becoming an issue for local gastronomy, as in many other places. By 2015 there were 14,500 fast food outlets in Saudi Arabia, while the number of full-service restaurants dropped to 11,300 by 2015 (Statista, 2023). Many travellers also opt for fast-food outlets because of their convenience and familiarity. Statista Consumer Insights (2023) also shows that there are concerns among frequent travellers in Saudi Arabia about food & water security (34% saw this as a major issue). The same report shows that frequent travellers in Saudi Arabia are less interested in dining experiences (40%) than the Saudi population in general (46%).

Memorable Experiences

Gastronomy is strongly linked to memory, and one of the most important outcomes of tourism are the memorable experiences of the places and people we visit. As Salman Alotaibi explains in Chapter 4, memorable experiences are collectively produced, and co-creation between hosts and visitors is a key aspect of gastronomic experiences. The co-creation of memorable experiences becomes an important marketing tool, because the social interaction in the experience generates emotions linked to the people and places in the destination. The emotional content of such experiences also heightens their memorability, as well as increasing positive experience outcomes, including satisfaction, positive word of mouth, and intention to revisit.

Alotaibi also examines how the unique gastronomic offerings of different regions of Saudi Arabia help to shape memorable experiences. He describes the development of opportunities for visitors to actively participate in the preparation of the traditional dessert areeka, made with whole wheat baked bread combined with ghee, honey, and dates. Visitors can engage in the co-creation process, and become “creative tourists” (Richards and Raymond, 2000) by observing the various stages involved in making the dish or by exerting control over the quantity of honey or dates used in its preparation. Visitors can also get involved in collaborative baking activities, including the preparation of al mifa bread. Accompanying the areeka with coffee can add to the co-creation dimension of the experience, as well as helping to strengthen the creative industries, as suggested by Maspul (2022).

As Khaled Alsumait outlines in Chapter 5, the memorability of experiences can be increased through the development of food and drink trails and tours. Drawing on many examples of food trails in North America, Australia and Europe, he highlights the factors that increase their effectiveness, showcasing a wide range of different

foods including cheese, donuts, and apple pie. These organised trails arguably allow tourist planners to effectively market local gastronomy by capitalising on pre-existing networks to leverage a stronger brand profile while reducing costs.

The stimulation of food memorability is also evident in the programme titled “Our Culinary Legacy,” developed by the Saudi Culinary Arts Commission. This programme aims to encourage amateur and professional Saudi chefs to document and preserve traditional Saudi recipes. The initiative looks to collect different traditional recipes from across the Kingdom’s 13 regions in one cookbook. The aims include:

- To document and preserve the most popular traditional Saudi recipes;
- To engage and excite the population about the Saudi culinary scene;
- To uncover the talent of local Saudi chefs to enrich the Culinary Arts sector;
- To inspire the next generation by sharing traditional recipes from older generations, and;
- To educate the community about the diversity of Saudi cuisine by publishing a comprehensive cookbook of recipes from all regions (Saudi Culinary Arts Commission, 2023)

Such projects are also helping to build the knowledge and professional skills that are essential for the future development of Saudi gastronomy tourism.

Novel and Familiar Experiences

Our gastronomic memories include both the new types of food that we have experienced during our travels, as well as the familiar tastes that constitute our feeling of ‘home’. As a number of contributions to this volume underline, there is a certain tension in gastronomy tourism between the search for gastronomic novelty and the yearning for familiar foods.

In Chapter 6, Huthayfah Madkhali considers the relationship between gastronomic identity and tourist satisfaction, and he argues that the novel vs the familiar has been a long-noted dichotomy in gastronomic tourism. Saudi Arabia still has many traditional foods that can offer a familiar experience for locals, and a growing range of new restaurants and eating experiences are springing up to offer novel gastronomic experiences for tourists and locals alike. As Fahad Alhuqbani notes in Chapter 7, tourists currently have to be active in seeking out gastronomic experiences beyond those provided by restaurants and hotels. If Saudi Arabia wants to expand the demand for, and therefore the supply of gastronomy tourism experiences, it also needs to try and attract more adventurous gastronomic tourists.

This underlines that the types of gastronomy that need to be developed will depend on what tourists are looking for. In Chapter 8, Salman Alotaibi argues that

destinations need to offer a greater range of gourmet culinary experiences to guests, accentuating the genuine and culturally significant nature of the cuisine. Many of the contributions to this book highlight gourmet cuisine as an important aspect of gastronomy tourism in Saudi Arabia. Such gourmet experiences may indeed be familiar and expected by tourists from Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, although tourists from other regions may be more eager to have more simple food experiences which they may perceive as being more closely related to local culture, which many will also perceive as being more 'authentic'.

Authenticity in Gastronomic Experiences

In Chapter 8 Salman Alotaibi provides a detailed discussion of the complex subject of authenticity, outlining four different approaches, namely the objectivist, constructivist, existentialist, and postmodernist perspectives for assessing authenticity. This mirrors wider debates about the nature of authenticity in the tourism literature, and the shifting frames of reference used to establish the authenticity of cultural phenomena. (Bueno de Andrade-Matos, Richards & de Azevedo Barbosa, 2022). As Alotaibi points out, many visitors perceive food as authentic when it is made by locals according to traditional practices. The fact that the 'local' has become the touchstone of authenticity (Russo & Richards, 2016) provides an additional layer of complexity in the discussion about the nature of authentic gastronomy. Given that the Middle East has long been a melting pot of different peoples, cultures and cuisines means that the idea of what is 'local' depends on many different factors.

In gastronomic experiences the local dimension of authenticity can be enhanced through the use of locally-sourced foods. Alotaibi discusses the way in which gastronomy based on locally-sourced food can stimulate other sectors of the local economy (agriculture, fishing) and increase sustainability by using local ingredients requiring less transportation. Having local food as a central element in the gastronomic offer also helps enhance the perception of the local community that local culture, traditional practices and sustainability are important.

Hybrid Gastronomy

A number of contributions to this volume consider the relationship between Saudi Arabian and Middle Eastern gastronomy. Fahad Alhuqbani argues that "Middle Eastern cuisine, spanning from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, encompasses a myriad of flavours and textures that reflect a mosaic of cultural identities.... opportunity to save both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, strengthen local communities, and foster intercultural appreciation." This gastronomic mosaic both forms part of Saudi cuisine as well as being influenced by Saudi gastronomy itself. This reciprocal relationship between different gastronomic traditions often produces a hybrid form of gastronomy, which can be a source of innovation and change. Scarpato (2002) notes how the development of new cuisines from hybrid influences can be an extension of

the marketing needs of the hospitality industry and tourism marketing organisations to develop new and engaging experiences.

Middle Eastern cuisine is well established globally, with emblematic foods such as kebabs, shawarma, hummus and falafel being drawn from many different sources. Middle Eastern restaurants are common outside the region, spread by migration routes to Europe, the Americas and Asia. Saudi Arabian food can benefit from the general familiarity that the spread of Middle Eastern cuisine helps to create among (potential) international tourists.

The Future of Gastronomy

In Chapter 9, Samer Yaghmour and Kashif Hussain deal with issues of innovation and technological change in gastronomy tourism. Particular attention is paid to the impact of new technologies, including techniques for preparing and promoting food, the rise of virtual reality (VR) and the food apps and online platforms that are now common the world over. As Khaled Alsumait also outlines in Chapter 5, new technologies are also an important part of the development of food trails, with the production of websites, interactive maps, apps and self-guided tours to enhance the visitor experience.

New technologies provide new gastronomic opportunities, but they can also challenge more traditional approaches. Immersive culinary experiences can be created with new technologies, such as Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality. These can also partially take over the traditional role of storytelling related to gastronomy. Engaging storytelling still currently requires human input, not least in the development of content and storylines. In the future, however, it may well be possible to generate gastronomic storytelling with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In Chapter 10 Faizan Ali, Osman Sesliokuyucu, and Kashif Ali Khan look at robotic gastronomy experiences and their potential impact on gastronomy tourism. Robots are being increasingly deployed in food service settings due to rising human labour costs and the falling cost of robots. The shift towards robotic food service was also strengthened by the impact of Covid-19. Robots are now used in a wide range of roles, from check-in to back kitchen. The forecast boom in the use of robotics will also impact sectors with high levels of human interaction, including hotels and restaurants.

So far explorations of robots in tourism in general, and gastronomy tourism in particular, have been scarce due to the relatively limited deployment of robots in hospitality settings. But robotic gastronomy has recently been analysed in a flurry of studies related to food service (e.g. Fuste-Forne, 2021; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2022). There is some debate about the extent to which robots are acceptable to consumers, with Spence (2023) arguing that robots are “unlikely to find a place in the market for fast food, never mind in the world of fine dining (gastronomy)” (p.1). But

there is little doubt that the use of robots will have an influence on the gastronomic experience of tourists, whether they are aware of this or not.

Ali et al. argue that robots can now feature anthropomorphic characteristics that can help humans adjust to their presence. The extent to which robots will be acceptable to their human guests is argued by Ali et al. to be a function of their competence, or their ability to perform tasks accurately and reliably and their coolness, which is often an important aspect of the gastronomic experience. Through an online survey they found a significant, positive impact of robotic gastronomy experience on outcomes including hedonic value, satisfaction, and utilitarian value.

The deployment of such new technologies is likely to be an important aspect of innovation in gastronomy tourism in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In 2023 robotics company registrations in Saudi Arabia reached over 2,300, a 52% increase compared with 2022 (Arab News, 2023). Mukherjee, Rajendran and Wahab (2022) also outline how digital technology is now being utilised in Halal tourism, including the internet of things, cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, and advanced robotics.

In spite of this rapid development, Ali et al. raise questions about the future deployment of robots in gastronomic settings, including how facial expressions might be improved to stimulate positive responses, how customer resistance to robots can be overcome and how can robots be personalised and made to fit into the hospitality working environment where they will need to collaborate with their human counterparts. In terms of gastronomic experiences, there may well also be challenges in maintaining authenticity, which is a general issue for gastronomy tourism in the Kingdom in general.

Conclusion

To come back to the basic question posed in this conclusion: how can Saudi Arabia transform itself into a gastronomic destination? Although Saudi Arabia clearly possesses a rich range of culinary resources, there is a need for creativity and innovation in order to ensure that these can be crafted into engaging experiences for tourists.

What elements are therefore needed to develop a successful gastronomic destination? As many of the contributions to this volume suggest, there are many successful examples of gastronomic tourism development internationally. To develop a country like Saudi Arabia, together with its constituent regions, into a target for gastronomic tourists, however, a strategic effort is required involving all of the key stakeholders in the gastronomy tourism system, including hospitality and food service operators, tourism companies, the cultural and creative industries, the local community and government. A start has been made with the development of the “Our Culinary Legacy” programme (Saudi Culinary Arts Commission, 2023), but more strategic effort is needed.

For a start, the links between the agriculture, food, gastronomy, tourism and creative sectors need to be strengthened. As Salman Alotaibi suggests, a sustainability approach can play an important role here, because improving the sustainability of food supply chains will benefit local suppliers and local communities, and increase the perceived importance of gastronomy in the country. The gastronomic efforts of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) need to be encouraged so that innovation in the sector is also increased, growing the supply of novel gastronomic experiences.

As previous experience with the development of gastronomic tourism in countries such as Korea, Thailand and Malaysia have shown (Richards, 2012), it is also important for awareness of national and regional cuisine to be developed in international markets. Unless potential visitors are aware of the gastronomic offer of the places they visit, they cannot be considered gastronomic tourists, since they are not motivated by gastronomy to visit. Raising the profile of a cuisine internationally requires marketing, but also what might be termed 'gastrodiplomacy' (Suntikul, 2019). Support for restaurants abroad, ensuring supplies of local food to eating establishments and culinary events. Such a campaign also needs to include specific gastronomic events that can act as a showcase for national and regional cuisine, and introduce chefs and other gastronomy professionals to the international scene. This can also be done in tandem with the tourism sector, for example by staging food-related events in conjunction with major travel trade fairs.

An interesting example of gastrodiplomacy is the "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" programme (MKP). The MKP was launched in 2006, and has since evolved to become a national branding initiative. MKP effectively brands Malaysia through its cuisine, for example by supporting the growth of Malaysian restaurants abroad. In 2012 there were 647 Malaysian restaurants worldwide, an increase of over 40% compared with 2010 (Nahar, Ab Karim, Karim, Ghazali & Krauss, 2018). This is a model that other countries have also followed, and it provides an interesting platform for partnership between the public and private sectors, as well as strengthening links between agriculture, hospitality, tourism, food exports and destination image.

In this book a specific place-based approach to gastronomy tourism is adopted, with Saudi Arabia as the main focus of enquiry. Even within a single country, however, it is clear that gastronomic experiences traverse a wide range of settings, practices and tools, and that gastronomy tourism goes far beyond the mere consumption of food. The contributions to this volume have made it clear that food is an expression of a place, which is made concrete by the contact between locals and visitors and the gastronomic practices that they share.

One of the key questions in the future development of gastronomy tourism in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, is whether food is a prime motivation for travel for visitors. In other words, do we have true gastronomy tourism, and can Saudi Arabia be seen as a gastronomic destination? There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia, in common with many other tourist destinations, has a rich store of gastronomic resources that it can use to attract visitors. This applies whether those visitors are seeking novelty or familiarity (as Madkhali argues in Chapter 6), because the Middle

Eastern context of Saudi food provides links with many other gastronomic cultures and adds instant recognisability to many aspects of local cuisine. At the same time, unique local gastronomic practices can generate a feeling of novelty that will appeal to those seeking new food experiences.

Saudi cuisine has been enriched by the meeting of foodways from Asia, Africa and Europe, which also enables local chefs to experiment with innovative new foods and gastronomic practices. Leading edge gastronomic establishments, such as Indulge Thyself in Jeddah, have been instrumental in leading change. Indulge Thyself has developed zero-waste fine dining utilising innovative fermentation and pickling techniques, using up to 95% of locally sourced ingredients to support local farmers and reduce their carbon footprint (Taleb, 2023). As Nawal AlKhalawi, chef at culinary pop-up Asfar (which translates as: 'to transcend through multi-dimensional travel') says on the Asfar Website:

“In the coming years, I envision the culinary landscape of Saudi Arabia emphasising highlighting local cuisine and infusing innovative twists into traditional dishes. There will be a growing interest in healthier options that cater to diverse dietary preferences and intolerances. I aspire to contribute to this evolution by leveraging my expertise in molecular gastronomy and using Saudi cuisine as a base to create unique and artistic dishes. I see myself as an ambassador for Saudi cuisine, spreading its flavours and concepts globally.”

Her vision is to make Saudi cuisine “accessible and beloved by global travellers searching for cultural richness, luxurious hospitality, community, and an exceptional culinary experience” (Asfar Experience, 2023).

The growth of fine dining in Saudi Arabia, based on a rich gastronomic tradition, is an important aspect in profiling the country as a gastronomic destination. Many of the contributions to the current volume equate gastronomy tourism with gourmet food experiences, and this is one area where the economic power of Saudi Arabia can help integrate local gastronomic knowledge with expertise from abroad. This is also an important function of gastronomic events, which act as platforms to showcase Saudi cuisine, attract visitors and grow the creative industries. With plans to stage even more international events in future, there is little doubt that Saudi Arabia will be able to attract growing numbers of gastronomic tourists.

One of the major challenges in such developments, however, will be maintaining the authenticity of local gastronomy, which is currently based on deeply embedded culinary practices. Such practices encompass not just the eating habits of the local population, but the wider social rituals linked to the meals and celebrations of the local population. Many of the contributions to this volume express concern at the threat to gastronomic identity in Saudi Arabia posed by the growth of fast-food outlets and the globalisation of eating habits. It will be important to try and support food-related rituals, as with the UNESCO designation of Buraydah as a Creative City of Gastronomy (Maspul, 2022). Linking food and creativity could form an important support for local gastronomy in future, for example through the promotion of creative

tourism (Emmendoerfer, de Almeida, Richards, & Marques, 2023). By enabling visitors to participate actively in the preparation of dishes and the sharing of meals, creative tourism experiences can provide an important link between visitors and local culture and creativity (Marques & Richards, 2012) and an important support for authentic local cuisine (Marques, Engberg & Björkroth, 2022).

The development of creative gastronomic experiences can provide support for the creative industries in general, a development already seen in the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy programme. The production of food experiences also involves other creative sectors such as design, art, music and architecture. In this sense, the development of gastronomic tourism is also an important stimulus for creativity and can make a contribution to the aim of the Saudi Vision 2030 to shift the economy into a more diverse, creative and sustainable direction.

Another area where Saudi Arabia can capitalise on its gastronomic culture and practices is in the provision of halal food. It is interesting that while there is a growing body of literature on halal-related travel in the wider tourism literature, there is little mention of halal food in the current volume. This probably relates to the prevalence of halal food in Saudi Arabia, where the provision of such food is not seen as an issue. However, it could be seen as an advantage internationally, where there is also a growing Islamic travel market. For example, the Muslim friendly travel market in Turkey alone in 2021 was estimated to be worth \$5.7 billion. These travellers also contribute to the demand for halal food, estimated at some \$1,2 trillion annually (DinarStandard, 2022).

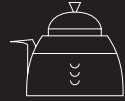
Much research remains to be done, as indicated by many of the chapters in this book. A lot of the work presented here is necessarily conceptual, underlining the relative lack of empirical data available on tourism and gastronomy in Saudi Arabia. Hopefully, future studies inspired by the current volume will start to address this issue.

02

An Introduction to Gastronomy Tourism

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Introduction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)—a theory in developmental psychology that classifies the universal deficiency and growth needs of society—notes that from the moment we are born, our most basic human requirement is to eat. This theory suggests that meeting fundamental needs like food, water, and shelter is a prerequisite for achieving higher satisfaction levels. Beyond the essential nourishment food provides, people enrich their vital experiences by adding value to their eating encounters. This enhancement is crucial for progressing through Maslow's hierarchy, ultimately reaching the peak of self-realisation (Güzel & Apaydin, 2016). Significantly, the exploration of diverse cultural and local foods becomes a catalyst for this journey of self-realisation.

Influences from modern advancements like technology and increased competition have sparked the evolution of various types of tourism. Cultural tourism, “halal” tourism, eco-tourism, ethical tourism, environment-friendly tourism, medical tourism, and sustainable tourism have emerged, broadening the scope of travel experiences beyond mere sightseeing (Petroman et al., 2013). In tourism, food transcends its status as a necessity to become a pivotal factor in destination selection. Tourists no longer embark on journeys solely for cultural experiences but also to discover the unique flavours of different regions (Smith, 2015; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). Tourists today seek more than just a visit; they desire the opportunity to savour new flavours and immerse themselves in different cultures (Sun et al., 2023). Consequently, food and drink have become integral gateways to understanding diverse cultures, leading to the concept of gastronomy tourism (Richards, 2015). There has been a noticeable upsurge in travel motivated by the desire to experience local dishes and engage in the entire gastronomic process, from production to consumption (Kim et al., 2019). This trend is referred to as gastronomic tourism.

The emergence of gastronomic tourism reflects a deliberate choice by tourists to tailor their travels around experiencing local flavours and actively participating in gastronomic activities (Park et al., 2023). This chapter delves into the multifaceted realm of Gastronomy Tourism, exploring its conceptual underpinnings, its relationship with general tourism, and the essential elements connected to gastronomy. As we navigate the intricacies of gastronomy and tourism, we uncover gastrotourists' motivations and their impact on local food consumption, festivals, and heritage kitchens. Lastly, the chapter notes a few discussion questions that can be used for future research.

Basic Concepts of Gastronomy and Motivations of Gastro-Tourists

At its core, gastronomy is about nurturing a vibrant and healthy food culture that covers all aspects of food and drink, from production to consumption (Seyitoğlu, 2019). It emphasises hygiene, aesthetics, and tastes that appeal to individuals. Despite being commonly defined as the art of eating and drinking, gastronomy extends into scientific realms such as chemistry, nutrition, psychology, sociology, and history (Shenoy, 2005). The primary goal of gastronomy goes beyond simply enjoying food; it aims to support human health by providing nourishment (Sormaz et al., 2016). As gastronomy tourism evolves and influences travellers' motivations, several concepts have emerged in the literature to form a lexicon of gastronomy (Yalin, 2021).

Lexicon of Gastronomy	Gastronom
	Gourmet
	Gurman
	Degustator
	Gastronomic Identity
	Gastro Tourist

Figure 1: Lexicon of Gastronomy – Adapted from Yalin (2021)

Gastronom: Described as an individual with a passion for food, a refined palate, and expertise in eating and drinking.

Gourmet: Derived from the French term, gourmet is defined as having a profound knowledge of taste, food, and flavoring.

Gurman: Characterized as an individual indifferent to food culture and knowledge, eating solely for sustenance.

Degustator: A person knowledgeable about beverage quality, particularly one who engages in tasting drinks.

Gastronomic Identity: The environmental and cultural elements of a region that encompass food culture, table manners, flavours, and climatic conditions.

Gastro Tourist: An individual who embarks on journeys for the specific purpose of eating and drinking, extending beyond conventional meals.

Gastrotourists travel with a particular emphasis on eating and drinking beyond regular meals (Thomas, 2018). They have experience in presenting and serving food and beverages from diverse cultures. Unlike traditional tourists who aim to simply visit a destination, modern travellers are increasingly motivated to savour the unique regional dishes of the places they explore (Williams et al., 2019). The emergence of the concept of gastronomy has significantly influenced tourists' objectives, with indulgence in the local delicacies unique to each destination becoming their primary goal. Describing gastrotourists involves highlighting their motivations, where their keen interest in food and drink is a compelling force propelling them to their chosen destinations. Various models and theories categorise gastrotourist types into four groups (Boyne et al., 2003):

Type 1 Tourists: Gastronomy is significant in their holiday experiences. They actively seek places with gastronomic heritage, quality; and regional food is integral to their travel agenda.

Type 2 Tourists: While gastronomy is highly important, they do not actively seek out specific food and beverages during their travels.

Type 3 Tourists: : Gastronomy is not a primary focus in their holiday experiences. However, if presented with gastronomic opportunities, they may engage in activities related to food and drink during their travels.

Type 4 Tourists: Possess no interest in gastronomy, even if quality gastronomic products are abundant and visible.

Moreover, Chaney & Ryan (2012) add further dimensions, stating that gastrotourists travel for reasons such as differentiation, uniqueness, belonging, authentic experiences, exotic environments, learning, experiential satisfaction, self-actualization, inclusion, surmounting safety, sensory content, and the pleasures of eating and drinking. In addition, Hjalager (2004) offers an alternative classification, grouping gastrotourists into recreational, existential, diversionary, and experimentalist categories:

Recreational Tourists: Place less importance on food and drink events during their holiday, preferring familiar foods consumed at home.

Existential Tourists: Seek to escape daily routine and prioritise accessible and abundant food options while on vacation.

Diversionary and Experimental Tourists: Exhibit a greater interest in food

and drink. Existential tourists see new culinary experiences as opportunities to try something unconventional, while experimentalists seek trendy food and beverages.

In summary, the intricate world of gastronomy and tourism unfolds as a holistic exploration of culinary delights and travel motivations. Gastronomy, extending beyond eating and drinking, encompasses principles of hygiene, aesthetics, and taste across diverse scientific domains. The evolving landscape of gastronomic tourism introduces concepts that symbolise various facets of the gastronomic experience, from passionate gastronomes to knowledgeable degustation. The motivations driving gastrotourists are nuanced, ranging from those prioritising gastronomy in their holidays to those indifferent to its allure. This contemporary trend aligns with travellers' desires for unique regional dishes, reshaping tourism objectives and fostering a spectrum of experiences, from differentiation and self-actualisation to the sheer pleasures of gastronomic indulgence. In this dynamic interplay, gastronomy tourism becomes a conduit for exploring local products. It facilitates cultural interactions, offering destinations a strategic avenue to showcase their gastronomic heritage and enthrall discerning travellers.

Gastronomy and Tourism

The term “gastronomy,” originating from the Greek words “gastros” (stomach) and “nomos” (law, rule), traces its origins to French cuisine (Corona, 2019). Gastronomy involves knowing food and beverages to enhance the pleasure of eating and drinking, often seen as the “art of living” (Yasli & Yuncu, 2023, p. 1). Alternatively, it is defined as the “science and art of food and drink and table building” (Sormaz et al., 2016; p. 726). Despite its relatively short history, research has clarified gastronomy's practical and theoretical aspects over time. Initially, Santich (2004) described it as a branch of science guiding how, where, when, and in what compositions food and drink are consumed. Later, it evolved into a discipline exploring table layouts, tastes, constructions, visuals, and the relationship between food and beverages within the culinary culture (Türkay & Şengül, 2016; p. 89). Additionally, gastronomy is seen as preserving human well-being through a good diet and contributing to the enjoyment of life.

Beyond mere culinary aspects, gastronomy is intricately linked with art, sociology, psychology, and cultural philosophy, making it an interdisciplinary activity (Klosse, 2013). Gastrogeography, a concept that has been gaining prominence, explicitly explores the geographical links between tourism and gastronomy (Brooks, 2020). The geography of food and eating habits strengthens the connection between tourism and gastronomy. Zahari et al. (2009) illustrate a model showcasing the interconnectedness of gastronomy with various sciences (See Figure 1.2). Recognizing gastronomy as a multidisciplinary science underscores its social and cultural significance. Scholars emphasise that the science of gastronomy should be regarded distinctly, encompassing both scientific principles and practical applications (Klosse, 2013).

This recognition underscores the intricate interplay of various scientific fields in shaping our understanding of gastronomy and highlights its broader implications within society and culture.

Gastronomy: what is eaten, how, why, when, where and with whom?

Communication	History	Literature
Cooking Cuisine	Agriculture	Geography
Economics	Technology	Medicine
Politics	Law	Ethics
Religion	Philosophy	Commerce

Figure 2: Multidisciplinary Model for the Study of Gastronomy - Adapted from Zahari et al. (2009)

Tourism, defined by Richards (2002), involves activities satisfying those engaged in tourism-related pursuits. Gastronomy tourism, in contrast, refers to journeys with the primary goal of experiencing the local gastronomic elements of destinations. This form of tourism is favoured by those seeking to indulge in festivals, fair events, unique flavours, and food’s intricate production and preparation processes (Kim et al., 2019). The dynamic relationship between gastronomy and tourism encompasses many activities and experiences (Graham, 2021). One of the pivotal reasons for amplifying gastronomy’s value in tourism is the existence of diverse food and drink cultures (Hsu et al., 2022). Countries, regions, cities, and even rural settlements strategically leverage their unique gastronomic values to bolster tourism marketing efforts, competing fiercely to attract more tourists. Kivela and Crofts (2006) highlight the role of gastronomy in shaping tourists’ experiences and their likelihood of returning to a destination. Similarly, Camacho-Gonzalez et al. (2022) underscore the importance of a destination’s cultural, historical, and gastronomic roots in tourism development. The main driving force behind gastronomic tourism is the desire to experience local tastes firsthand (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Gastronomic events play a pivotal role in achieving post-travel satisfaction for tourists, emphasising the importance of gastronomic activities in enhancing the appeal and sustainability of a destination. The rapid growth of gastronomic tourism in recent years is attributed to the broader increase in special interest tourism, driven by improved living standards and socioeconomic conditions (Metaxas & Karagiannis, 2016). The substantial expenditure of approximately one-third of tourists’ income on local food experiences underscores the significant contribution of gastronomic tourism to developing destinations (Lee et al., 2015).

Mitchell and Hall (2003) categorised tourists based on their level of interest and active participation in the local cuisine specific to their chosen destinations. They

found a direct correlation between levels of engagement and interest in gastronomic tourism. They stated that gastronomes exhibit the highest levels of both engagement and interest. Local and foreign gourmets demonstrate moderate interest and participation, whereas familiar gourmets exhibit lower levels of engagement. These variations in participation levels can be attributed to the evolving preferences of modern cultural consumers and the emergence of postmodern consumption patterns influenced by changes in eating habits. Consequently, these shifts in food consumption trends significantly impact the marketing dynamics of tourism destinations. Cultural values, originality, and promotion of local products are key tourist attractions, highlighting the interconnectedness of tourists' participation in gastronomy tourism with their interest in cultural experiences (Kiralova & Hamarneh, 2017).

Gastronomy tourism provides an avenue to explore local products and facilitates interactions with local communities (Rinaldi, 2017). Activities encompassing gastronomy routes, local markets, fairs, festivals, cooking classes by chefs, vintage festivities, cheese-making stages, olive harvesting, and wine tasting contribute to the immersive gastronomy tourism experience. Additionally, some tourists explicitly travel to acquire culinary skills, such as learning cheese making in France or mastering tapas in Spain (Chang et al., 2021). Tourists who partake in the rich tapestry of local flavours are often labelled cultural tourists, as they discern and appreciate the cultural values in destination cuisines. Gastronomy tours, designed for tourists to immerse themselves in the food culture of destinations, play a pivotal role in spotlighting these regions. Existing literature indicates that the desire to savour local flavours ranks as one of the leading motivations for foreign tourists visiting a particular destination (Sormaz et al., 2015). Furthermore, the year-round appeal of gastronomic tourism, which minimises the seasonality associated with traditional tourism, presents an opportunity to augment tourism revenues (Garanti & Berjozkina, 2022).

In summary, the fusion of gastronomy and tourism represents a compelling force shaping contemporary travel. Gastronomy tourism, driven by the desire to savour local tastes and immerse in authentic experiences, has become a prominent and dynamic niche. Its appeal, rooted in diverse food cultures and strategic significance for destination marketing, positions gastronomy as a critical factor in tourist decision-making. The various categories of gastronomic tourists reflect the evolving preferences of modern consumers, emphasising the importance of cultural values and authenticity. Beyond exploration, gastronomy tourism fosters meaningful interactions and contributes to destinations' year-round attractiveness, challenging seasonality constraints. As this trend gains momentum globally, preserving and promoting gastronomic values becomes essential for destinations seeking to harness the economic and cultural benefits of gastronomy tourism.

Gastronomy Tourism and Local Food Consumption

According to Chaney and Ryan (2012), gastronomy tourism involves travel undertaken by those seeking to experience local tastes, emphasising the integral role of food in the tourism sector (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). The literature identifies two approaches to food consumption in international tourism: the mandatory approach, highlighting the significance of food consumption; and the symbolic approach, emphasising the symbolic reflections embedded in tourists' food choices (Mak et al., 2012). Gastronomy tourism, driven primarily by food, focuses on discovering local culinary delights and gaining an authentic experience in food and beverage. Local foods contribute significantly to tourism, enhancing the competitiveness of destinations and playing a pivotal role in tourism promotion (Frochot, 2003). Tourists' inclination to experience local products provides an opportunity to connect with the destination's identity, creating lasting and memorable tourism experiences (Seyfi et al., 2020). Tourists' food consumption preferences are influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-demographic factors, as well as past experiences (Su et al., 2023).

Gastronomy Tourism and Food Festivals

Whether singular or recurring, festivals are organised events designed to entice tourists by providing opportunities to discover and savour unique foods and beverages specific to a region (Yang et al., 2020). These festivals aim to heighten awareness of local culinary offerings, attract new visitors, and foster brand loyalty by celebrating food and drink. Many destinations worldwide have gained popularity by hosting diverse and captivating food festivals, enticing tourists solely for these culinary experiences (Kim et al., 2022). Notable festivals include the Sydney International Food Festival, the Cheese Festival of Great Britain, the Thai Vegetarian Festival, the Wisconsin Big Cheese Festival, the Spain Seafood Festival, and others. Food festivals significantly contribute to the development and promotion of destinations, emerging as an integral and complementary element in strategic destination promotion (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

Gastronomy Tourism and Heritage Kitchens

In recent years, behaviours surrounding eating have played a crucial role in promoting the local dishes and cuisines of tourist destinations (Zhang et al., 2019). Local cuisines serve as the foundation of intangible cultural heritage, and provide visitors with an authentic cultural experience by exploring local flavours (Chang et al., 2021). Authentic cuisines that are unique to a region are pivotal in transforming destinations into international brands, creating a competitive advantage for tourist

destinations and positively contributing to local economic development (Su et al., 2023).

As the interest in gastronomy grows, countries strive to highlight their unique cuisine to gain a competitive edge, leveraging their local cuisines to contribute to tourism sustainability by preserving cultural practices (Qiu et al., 2022). Food culture symbolises the power and status of societies, serving various purposes in long-standing events such as banquets, festivals, and ceremonies. Greater importance has been placed on the cultural values of societies, emphasising the need for a concrete approach to ensure the sustainability of these values. Food and drinks, perceived not just as sustenance but as drivers for sustainability, actively support intangible cultural heritage and attract tourists to regions (Cerquetti et al., 2022). In conclusion, food culture guides tourists' travels, offering insights into the rich heritage and identity of the destinations they explore.

Conclusion

The exploration of Gastronomy Tourism is a burgeoning niche that caters to evolving consumer preferences while significantly contributing to destinations' economic, cultural, and social fabrics. The fusion of gastronomy and tourism transcends traditional travel boundaries, providing diverse experiences beyond eating and drinking. In the contemporary landscape, where travellers seek more than a mere visit, gastronomy tourism emerges as a conduit for meaningful interactions, cultural immersion, and indelible memories. The symbiotic relationship between gastronomy and tourism shapes modern travel experiences. Tourists are increasingly drawn to destinations promising a sensory journey through unique flavours, culinary traditions, and authentic local experiences, challenging traditional constraints and providing a year-round appeal.

Gastronomy tourism's appeal lies in showcasing a destination's identity through its gastronomic heritage, with local cuisines transforming destinations into international brands. Authentic culinary practices create a competitive advantage and contribute to tourism's sustainability by preserving cultural traditions. In the global landscape of increased particular interest in tourism, gastronomy tourism stands out as a prominent and dynamic niche. The substantial expenditure by the tourists on local food experiences underscores its significant contribution to destination development. It is a strategic avenue for destinations to differentiate themselves, foster brand loyalty, and compete globally. As this trend gains momentum worldwide, destinations must carefully balance preserving the authenticity of local cuisines with adapting to evolving consumer preferences. The cultural values embedded in food choices become key points of attraction that emphasise the interconnectedness of tourists' participation in gastronomy tourism with their interest in authentic cultural experiences. The fusion of gastronomy and tourism not only signifies a culinary journey but also reflects a transformative force shaping the future of travel. It challenges destinations to rethink marketing strategies, leverage unique gastronomic

values, and create immersive experiences resonating with the diverse preferences of today's travellers.

Looking ahead, preserving, and promoting gastronomic values will be crucial for destinations seeking to harness the full economic, cultural, and social benefits of the symbiotic relationship between gastronomy and tourism. Below are some specific questions that can frame future research agendas:

- How can destinations strategically leverage their unique gastronomic values to attract a diverse influx of tourists, considering the competitive landscape of global tourism?
- How does integrating gastronomy and tourism contribute to local cultural practices and intangible heritage sustainability? What challenges and opportunities does this present for destination management?
- As the interest in gastronomy tourism continues to grow, how can destinations balance the authenticity of local cuisines with the evolving preferences of modern cultural consumers?
- What role do food festivals play in shaping the gastronomic tourism landscape, and how can destinations optimise these events to enhance their appeal and promotional efforts?
- How does the perception of local food consumption vary among gastrotourists (e.g., Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, Type 4)? What factors influence their food choices and experiences?
- In the context of heritage kitchens, how can destinations preserve authentic culinary practices while adapting to the changing demands of gastronomy tourism?
- What strategies can destinations employ to maximise the economic benefits of gastronomy tourism, considering the substantial expenditure of tourists on local food experiences?

03

Saudi Gastronomy: The Tourism of Taste

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Introduction to Saudi Gastronomy

Saudi gastronomy comprises the culinary traditions and cuisine of Saudi Arabia. It encompasses the original ingredients, cooking techniques, and signature dishes that are characteristic of the region. Furthermore, Saudi gastronomy reflects the cultural heritage and traditions of the Saudi people, making it an important part of their identity (Almerico, 2014). Nevertheless, certain dishes are only cooked on specific occasions, and their ingredients and cooking techniques might differ from one province to the other. Saudi Arabia has 13 provinces, where each province has its own flora and fauna, topographic features, influenced by local or transboundary cultures, which in their entirety led to signature dishes. This chapter illustrates the different tastes from around the Kingdom and the main factors that influence them, highlighting how taste became a type of tourism type that helped develop a unique, Saudi gastronomy destination.

Factors Influencing Tastes Around The Kingdom

The four main flavour profiles from around the world are salty, sweet, bitter and sour (Nadathur & Carolan, 2017). Salty flavours come from dishes with salt, such as chips or nuts. Sweet flavours come from ingredients like candy and fruits. Bitter flavours come from numerous vegetables and unsweetened chocolate. Sour flavours are contained in food with acid, such as citrus fruits or vinegar. While all four flavours are found in Saudi Arabian cuisine, there are four additional factors influencing tastes around the Kingdom: flora and fauna, local and transboundary cultures, Islamic culture, and government roles.

Flora and Fauna Around The Kingdom

While there are many factors influencing gastronomy (Hjalager & Richards, 2003), Saudi gastronomy's most important factor is the flora and fauna of each province. The climate, water availability, and fertility of the land affect vegetation in Saudi Arabia. The right climate in the southern mountain provinces and far north provinces helps grow fruits and vegetables. Al Qassim, Tabuk, and Al Madinah provinces, along with the cities of Al Ahsa, Taif and Al Kharj, are rich in water and soil, which also facilitate growing vegetables and fruits. Abundant food production affects local cuisine and food taste (Estival, Corrêa, Pitaluga, Gomes & Spanhol, 2019). All four flavour profiles use local grown vegetables and fruits to give signature dishes their original and unique appearance, smell and taste.

Goat meat, honey, and ghee are essential ingredients in the cuisines of the southern mountain provinces of Aseer, Jazan, Al Baha, and Najran, where these ingredients are abundant. Similarly, fish is the most common ingredient in the coastal provinces of Tabuk, Al Madinah, Makkah, Eastern Province, and Jazan. The types of fish found in the Red Sea differ from the ones present in the Arabian Gulf. The Red Sea, for example, has varying depths and consequently hosts different species of fish such as sharks, rays, eels, scorpion fish, stone fish, crocodile fish, clown fish, grouper, trigger fish, squirrel fish, butterfly fish, angel fish, spade fish, puffer fish, butterfly fish, angel fish, bat fish and trevallies. All other internal and non-mountain provinces, such as Riyadh, Al Qassim, Hail, Al Jouf, and the Northern Provinces, include sheep and camel in their main dishes. That said, Al Qassim is an internal province that is responsible for one third of the Kingdom's fish production, with over 2,000 tons using water pools, the whole production is being exported to all provinces including coastal ones, as the local cuisine depends on sheep and camels' meat (Agency of Fish Stock, 2017).

Within the same scope, age of cattle, types of fish bones, and provincial typography all influence local cooking cultures. For example, older cattle need longer cooking periods and certain spices to be ready to serve. Fish with plenty of small bones cannot be used in dishes with red or white sauce as they would be hard to spot. Southern mountain provinces with hard rocky grounds are suitable for digging holes to serve as ovens, while other parts of the Kingdom use more traditional ways of cooking food.

Local and Transboundary Cultures

Other factors that have influenced Saudi gastronomy are the local and transboundary cultures. The local culture essentially mirrors Islamic tradition, one example being that Saudi gastronomy has no trace of alcohol and pig meat. Religion also serves as the basis of Saudi hospitality, as Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him): "[...] Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain his guest

generously [...]” (Al-Bukhari, 1978a). Thus, Saudi communities in different provinces believe that offering their guests camels, sheep, or goats is a way of showing generosity. Serving Saudi coffee to guests is also a customary part of Saudi hospitality, often accompanied by one of over 300 locally grown types of dates. Despite being commonly known as “Saudi” coffee, it does not possess a singular unified taste. Throughout the Kingdom, it is prepared in diverse ways using different ingredients, resulting in a range of taste profiles and intensities.

The Arabian Peninsula is surrounded by famous cuisines, such as the Levantine, Egyptian, Yemeni, Persian; and to some extent, Turkish, Indian and Mediterranean cuisines. Each has had its own impact on Saudi gastronomy. The Levantine, Persian and Turkish cuisines, for example, introduced different grilling styles leading to different tastes, the most famous being chicken and sheep shawarma and skewers. These transboundary cultures came to Saudi Arabia through Hajj, intraregional trade, tourism and globalisation. As for imported cuisines, they are most represented at fine dining restaurants, food trucks, and food events. While some of these vendors care about the authenticity of the imported cuisines, entrepreneurial chefs have created new dishes using nontraditional ingredients and cooking techniques.

Islamic Culture

Saudi culinary culture has also been influenced by prophetic medicine, which has affected what, how, and when to eat particular types of food (Monshi, 2017). Dates are the most frequently mentioned fruits in the Holy Qur’an, found in several surahs such as: Maryam (Mary); Qaf, Ash-Shuara (The Poets); and An-Nahl (The Bee). Surah Maryam (Mary) mentions that God provided Maryam, Prophet Jesus’s mother, with fresh dates when she was experiencing discomfort and pain during the final stages of her pregnancy. Speaking to Maryam, God says: “Shake the trunk of the palm toward you and fresh, ripe dates will drop down onto you” (Quran 19:25).

In hadiths narrated by the companions of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), dates were mentioned as a symbol of Muslims and the Islamic faith, and as one of the blessings that believers would be offered in Paradise. In the statement narrated by Ibn Umar: “The Prophet said there is a tree among the trees which is similar to a Muslim [in goodness], and that is the date palm tree” (Al-Bukhari, 1978a). In another hadith, the Messenger said: “Ajwah dates are from heaven and it cures from magic.” (Ben Hanbal 2008). Ajwah is one of the exceptional varieties of dates grown in the province of Al Madinah.

The Prophet also stressed the significance of dates as a source of nutrition and sustenance in several hadiths, which is why it remains a common ingredient in the Muslim diet. The Prophet (PBUH) said: “People in a house without dates are in a

state of hunger” (Abu Dawood, 2009). He taught his disciples that the date is an antidote to poison and an effective defence against black magic: “Whoever eats seven dates of Ajwah in the morning will not be hurt by poison or sorcery on that day” (Al-Bukhari, 1978c). The hadith also mentioned the importance of dates during the month of Ramadan, and this is why Muslims insist on breaking their fasts with dates throughout the holy month. The Prophet said: “If you break your fast, break it with dates, if you don’t have it, break it with water as it is purifying” (Abu Dawood, 2009).

In addition to dates, the Holy Quran and Prophetic hadiths mention other plants with extraordinary nutritional or medicinal properties such as the manna of Hedysarum, onion, garlic, black mustard, camphor, cucumber, pumpkin or gourd, fig, lentil, banana, basil, olives, date palm, pomegranate, toothbrush tree or mustard tree, manna tree or french tamarisk, grape, ginger, and the Nabak tree (Azarpour, Moraditochae, and Bozorgi, 2015). All these varieties of plants, fruits, vegetables as well as honey have been a part of Prophetic medicine and are still used to treat various ailments. Dates palm and goat’s milk for example are used as treatments for anaemia, fatigue, gastroenteritis, and worm infestation (Nasir et al., 2016) and Ajwah dates are used to treat liver toxicity as their extract is rich in vitamins and antioxidants (Sheikh et al., 2014). In addition, in two different reports by Ben Hanbal (2008), it is said that the Prophet used to eat watermelon and to put chewed dates into the mouths of newborn babies. Abu Dawood (2009) reported three traditions which showed that the Prophet ate dates with some other fruits, vegetables, and dairy products: “the Prophet ate watermelon/muskmelon with dates,” “Abdullah ibn Jafar said I saw the Messenger eat dates with cucumbers,” and the two sons of Alsulami reported that the Prophet loved eating butter with dates.” The variety of ingredients, reasons for, and ways of consumption are all part of Saudi gastronomy and the country’s rich history, which attract tourists and encourage them to taste the diversity of Saudi cuisine

Government Roles

The three main governmental stakeholders involved in Saudi Arabia’s gastronomy sector are the Ministry of Culture (represented by the Culinary Arts Commission); the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture; and the Ministry of Tourism. The Culinary Arts Commission (CAC), established in 2020, has become a well-integrated and effective reference that leads the advancement of the culinary arts sector in the Kingdom across its various components. The CAC also seeks to introduce Saudi dishes to local and global audiences, taking pride in the country’s culinary heritage and the many outstanding talents that populate its gastronomy sector.

The CAC has three key missions relating to Saudi Arabia's gastronomical development—culinary arts as an ambassador, as an experience, and as a livelihood. (CAC, 2021) It aims for Saudi Arabia to become a sought-after and authentic culinary destination; a home for incredible culinary experiences; and a source of livelihood for Saudi people and local communities. First, becoming an ambassador involves presenting the best of Saudi culture and hospitality on local and global scales, showcasing the country's culinary heritage and talent, transforming the Kingdom into a destination for unique and vibrant flavours in the heart of the Middle East and the Arab world, and becoming a reference for a well-integrated and effective culinary sector. Second, creating an experience means generating unique and unforgettable experiences for locals and visitors through an expanded local culinary offering that changes dominant perceptions of the country and allows people to connect and engage with the culinary ecosystem on a personal level. Thirdly, being a source of livelihood refers to the creation of unparalleled economic opportunities through extracting value from Saudi local culinary assets and professionals to foster a prosperous sector. It is also about pushing innovation and thought leadership across the value chain to attain regional Arab leadership in the culinary arts sector (CAC, 2021).

To translate this vision and missions into a roadmap, the Culinary Arts Commission listed 5 main objectives and 12 detailed objectives (CAC, 2021):

First objective: Identification and preservation of culinary assets and heritage:

1. Culinary arts registry development, maintenance and recognition program.
2. Culinary arts heritage preservation program.

Second objective: Promotion using original content and home-grown narratives:

3. Culinary arts media library and narratives development program.
4. Local sector promotion and menus integration program.
5. International promotion and gastro-diplomacy and exchange program.

Third objective: Promotion using gastro tourism and culinary arts events:

6. Saudi regional gastro tourism program.
7. Saudi flagship culinary arts events program.
8. Community engagement and regional culinary festivals program.

Fourth objective: Saudi culinary profession development and enhancement:

9. Culinary arts profession development and promotion program.
10. "Saudi-food" concepts and "Saudi-concepts" in food enhancement and development program.

Fifth objective: Advancement and innovation in production and culinary services:

11. Culinary products processing quality elevation and distribution program.
12. Saudi culinary products and services research, innovation and development program.

In relation to the first objective, the CAC launched a nation-wide initiative to investigate signature dishes and beverages in each province, tracing its original ingredients and cooking techniques. In less than four years, the CAC has developed a referential database for tens of Saudi dishes and beverages. Each entry in this database has several fields including the province of origin, history of and/or myths surrounding the dish or beverage, the authentic ingredients and cooking techniques used in its preparation, along with alternative ones that can be found in other provinces. All entries have been checked by several sources and documented with verbal and visual materials. Table 1 below shows only 13 signature dishes.

Table 1, shows only 13 signature dishes

No.	Province	Signature Dish
1	Riyadh	Marqooq
2	Makkah	Saleeq Rice
3	AlMadinah	Madini Rice
4	Eastern	Hasawi Rice
5	Aseer	Haneeth
6	Jazan	Magash Al-laham
7	Tabouk	Syadia
8	Alqassim	Klajja
9	Hail	Magshoosh bread and Kubaiba
10	Aljouf	Bakilah
11	Albahah	Magnah bread
12	Najran	Ruqsh
13	Northern Territory	Jareesh and Mulaihia

Source: Culinary Arts Comission (CAC,2023)

In relation to the second objective of the roadmap, the CAC developed several programmes to narrate the stories associated with each signature dish and beverage to national and international audiences. These programmes were carefully designed to promote local menus and gastronomy through diplomacy. Today, Saudi cuisine has a place at most major events taking place in the Kingdom, as well as in events abroad such as the World Travel Market in London and the Dubai Expo 2020.

In relation to the third objective of promoting Saudi food culture through tourism and events, the CAC signed agreements with the Ministry of Tourism and Saudi Commission of Tourism to support and promote food activities and events at all levels through regional tourism programmes, major exhibitions, and festivals. Central to this objective is the presence of local communities who drive the programme implementation as a means to ensure authenticity.

In relation to the fourth objective, the CAC recognised the importance of developing human capital within the culinary arts sector. As a result, it launched education and training programmes at local schools and scholarships for schools abroad. The programmes tackle “Saudi food” concepts and ways to enhance food quality and presentation, targeting chefs and culinary practitioners in the management sector. In relation to the fifth objective, the CAC introduced five programs to elevate products’ processing quality, food and beverage distribution, products and services research, as well as innovation and development. These programmes focus on the importance of continuous research for culinary innovation, as well as on developing ways to gain a competitive edge over international gastrotourism destinations.

Other government organisations are also playing key roles in maintaining the quality of ingredients and supporting supply chains. The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture established the Seed Bank , and facilitates food events such as farmers’ markets and food festivals. The Ministry of Tourism supports local cuisines by promoting and using their products in international events taking place all over the world, hence strengthening the country’s tourism ecosystem. In addition, the General Entertainment Authority attracts Michelin Star restaurants to be part of Saudi tourism seasons and supports young, local chefs to work at reputable restaurants. The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) General Authority provides technical and financial support to entrepreneurs and SMEs within the culinary arts sector to develop its ecosystem and introduce new initiatives.

Many other factors are influencing tastes, culinary arts, local cuisines and gastronomic destinations, including globalisation and technological development. Globalisation is an emergent, evolutionary phenomenon that resulted from economic, political, socio-cultural and technological processes and which affected many industrial and non-industrial sectors, including the tourism of taste (Hall & Mitchell, 2003). Examples of rapid technological innovations that affected the tourism of taste include cloud kitchens and face reading technology. A cloud kitchen is a takeaway outlet that does not provide a dine-in facility. In the era of the internet, this technology serves generation Y , who want most facilities ordered in one click. This technology not only gained momentum in recent years, but also controlled the taste, quality and price of food items (Choudhary, 2019). Face reading technology, on the other hand, is a software that allows researchers to measure facial expressions and emotional patterns induced by various food tastes, which helps in innovating, researching, and developing novel food items that consumers will enjoy (Bartkiene, Steibliene, Adomaitiene, Juodeikiene, Cernauskas, Lele & Guiné, 2019).

The Tourism of Taste

The tourism of taste refers to a growing trend where travellers seek out a tourist destination primarily for the pursuit of authentic culinary experiences. Saudi gastronomy, with its rich and diverse culinary traditions, has become a significant attraction for gastrotourists, as it offers visitors an authentic experience of the country's sophisticated lifestyle, showcasing high-quality food and locally grown products. Gastronomy tourism in Saudi Arabia not only provides a unique experience for travellers, but also serves as a valuable tool for showcasing the country's cultural heritage and culinary identity.

One of the main factors that attracts tourists to gastronomic events is the possibility of experiencing a sophisticated lifestyle (Cunha, 2018; Özbay & Çakir, 2022). Tourism and gastronomy share a close and long-standing relationship, with gastronomy often viewed as an indication of a destination's culture (Correia et al., 2008). Saudi Arabia has recognized the potential of gastronomy tourism as a means to promote its cultural heritage and attract visitors. Gastronomy plays a vital role in boosting tourism in Saudi Arabia by offering unique and authentic culinary experiences. Tourism and gastronomy go hand in hand, as many tourists seek out unique culinary experiences when visiting a destination (Seyitoğlu & Alphan, 2021).

Saudi Arabia as a Gastronomic Destination

Culinary tourism has become a major trend globally, and Saudi Arabia is no exception to this phenomenon. The country's gastronomy offers a genuine glimpse into the sophisticated lifestyle of the region, with its emphasis on high quality and locally sourced ingredients (Cunha, 2018; Dixit, 2019). Traditional Saudi Arabian dishes not only offer a sensory exploration of flavours but also provide insight into the country's cultural and historical tapestry. From the aromatic spices that infuse every dish to the locally sourced ingredients, the gastronomic landscape of Saudi Arabia is a testament to its heritage and traditions.

As travellers continue to seek more meaningful and authentic experiences, the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia offers a unique opportunity to leverage its gastronomic wealth. By promoting its rich and diverse culinary traditions, Saudi Arabia can attract a new wave of tourists interested in gastronomic tourism. Exploring traditional Saudi Arabian dishes and the influence of Saudi cuisine on global food culture can serve as a unique experience and valuable tourism asset for the country. The combination of tourism and gastronomy has proven to be a powerful tool for promoting Saudi Arabia as a destination (Patterson & Turaev, 2020). Nevertheless, the authenticity of gastronomic events in Saudi Arabia can also serve as a powerful tourism tool, attracting travellers seeking genuine and immersive culinary experiences.

When Saudis travel as tourists, they promote Saudi cuisine abroad by cooking traditional dishes and sharing them with their host destinations. Tourists play a significant role in the development and evolution of Saudi Arabian gastronomy. The country's rich and diverse culinary traditions are increasingly sought after by tourists searching for unique food and beverage experiences. As tourists explore and partake in the local gastronomy, they contribute to the elevation and preservation of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. They take back not only memories but also a deep appreciation for the country's gastronomic identity, thus becoming ambassadors for Saudi Arabian cuisine in their home countries.

Saudi families and individuals who are travelling abroad and cooking their own food are influencing global food culture (Al-Farhan, 2018). This cultural exchange is not a one-way street; it allows Saudi cuisine to gain exposure on the international stage, contributing to a more diverse and enriched global food culture. The traditional and authentic flavours of Saudi dishes are captivating the taste buds of people from different parts of the world, creating an intercultural, culinary exchange that is shaping the global food scene.

Recommendation to Further Develop Saudi Gastronomy

First, in order to appreciate the power of Saudi gastronomy, it is essential to understand the cultural significance of the Kingdom's cuisine. The CAC should note the growing interest in gastronomy as a significant part of the intangible cultural heritage (Berezka et al., 2018). In addition, Saudi Arabia offers a wealth of gastronomic experiences for travellers seeking sustainable tourism and a deep connection with local culture (Al-Tassan, 2023). The increasing interest in gastronomy tourism aligns with the growing trend of travellers seeking out authentic culinary experiences as a primary motive for choosing a destination (Febriyanti, 2020; Vukojević et al., 2021). Therefore, the CAC should consider more investment in its collaboration with the Saudi Tourism Commission to highlight these connections between gastronomy, culture, sustainability, authenticity, and tourism.

Reflecting on the ongoing efforts by the CAC to identify and preserve culinary assets and heritage, there is a need to attract more financial, human, and technical resources to cover the Kingdom's vast geographical area and accelerate support towards the ambitious objectives of the National Tourism Strategy and Saudi Vision 2030. Such resources can harness traditional harvests and cooking methods unique to each province, and support Saudi tourism in crafting a variety of culinary experiences that cater to the growing interest in gastronomy (Saraç et al., 2021), leading to tourism loyalty (Rojas & Huete-Alcocer, 2021).

In order to further develop its fourth and fifth objectives, the CAC can employ more resources to showcase traditional and innovative culinary experiences that reflect the local culture and elevate Saudi gastronomy tourism. It could also provide valuable tourism experiences for travellers, allowing them to immerse themselves in the

country's culinary traditions and understand the cultural significance of Saudi cuisine (Gozali, 2022; Eren, 2019). Extra resources can support conducting more scientific research, developing industrial reports, and organising workshops among experts to overcome challenges related to gastrotourism and achieve greater opportunities that transform Saudi Arabia into a unique gastronomy destination.

04

Street Food and Gastronomic Tourism: An Overview

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Introduction

“To get a feel for the beating heart of any community and to begin to understand a culture different from your own, you need to experience the food” (Kime, 2007, p. 14). Food tourism attracts travellers because it enables them to learn about the destination’s community, food sources, and recipes. Food can contribute to promoting the local community’s culture, and diversify tourism demand (UNWTO 2019). Tourists today have become interested in experiencing authentic food tourism that immerses in local culture and social interactions and leaves tourists with unforgettable experiences (Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee, 2022; Li et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2018; Choe & Kim, 2018).

Street food is considered an authentic tourist attraction that allows travellers to experience the local area (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). It has therefore become a significant practice because it can contribute to a destination’s economy and society (Henderson, 2019). This chapter provides an overview of street food and gastronomic tourism, including an introduction to and link between street food and gastronomic tourism. It reviews experiences of tourist destinations that offer street food and gastronomy, and builds on previous literature dealing with this subject. The chapter highlights key issues and challenges of street food and gastronomy, also raising safety-related concerns such as food poisoning and ways to avoid them.

What is Street Food and Gastronomic Tourism?

Street Food

According to The World Health Organization (2010), food is classified based on where it is prepared, including in traditional outlets, laboratories, homes, markets, and streets. This means that the place is considered to be a significant factor in food that can be consumed by customers, such as food that is prepared and ready to eaten based on the customer's status while sitting, standing, or walking (Alfiero et al., 2019). Specifically, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has defined street food as “ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers, especially in the streets and other similar places” (FAO 2017).

The FAO is a United Nations organisation focused on international endeavours to conquer hunger and enhance food security and nutrition across the globe. It has classified the many street foods available around the world, each reflecting a unique tradition and local culture. There is a vast diversity of raw materials around the globe used in preparing street food, beverages, and meals. Street food vendors, such as stalls, are mainly located outdoors or in a place where it is accessible for customers to reach them from the street. They have simple facilities, such as low-cost seating and rely on attracting customers via exclusive marketing onsite and word-of-mouth promotion. The owners of street food businesses are commonly individuals or families. Although the business of one stall or vendor is small, it impacts the local economy— for example, sellers buy their food products freshly from local sources such as farms and garden markets, which in turn helps sustain other small businesses.

The FAO analysed the distinctions between street food and other food establishments located near street settings, in response to the proliferation of fast-food chains and other commercial food markets worldwide. For instance, other forms of food trade, such as fast-food establishments, employ distinct methods of trading and marketing items compared to street food. These organisations allocate increased resources towards enhancing client services, including providing seating, air-conditioning, and the overall style of their establishments. Marketing techniques in the fast-food industry exhibit notable distinctions, primarily characterised by a strong emphasis on advertising and promotional activities. These initiatives play a pivotal role in cultivating brand loyalty among consumers. Additionally, most fast-food proprietors establish partnerships with regional enterprises, enabling them to exercise authority over the procurement of raw materials and the formulation of recipes.

Henderson (2019) refers to the FAO definition of street food as “ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers especially in the streets and other similar places” (46). She highlights that the field of street food encompasses a variety of food offers and products, either provided by motorised

vehicles, bicycles, or even pushcarts on the street. These facilities exist in urban and rural areas, and some are a temporary presence in the street food business, such as working at events and festivals. The location is determined by accessibility of locals and visitors to street food. Street food is quite different to any other type of prepared food, whether the food is provided at restaurants, shops, or even market stores. It offers customers food at affordable prices with a large and varied collection of spices and recipes (Henderson, 2019).

Additionally, the food truck is one of the street food forms that embodies a distinct methodology for overseeing the production and vending of street food. It is witnessing a surge in popularity and is assuming a crucial role within the realm of hospitality (Alfiero et al., 2017; Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022). In addition to conventional mobile food vendors, there has been a notable increase in the number of food truck operators in recent years that prioritise the quality of their cuisine, the selection of ingredients, and the re-interpretation of traditional recipes. The phenomenon of the “Gourmet Food Truck” has emerged as a result of increased demand for higher-quality food offerings, distinguishing it from traditional street food vendors (Alfiero et al., 2017; Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022).

Street foods combine authentic culture and traditional values, use local resources, and support local capacity building and the local economy, thus enhancing sustainability (Ellis et al., 2018; Henderson et al., 2012; Jeaheng, 2020). Vendors can often offer items to customers at lower prices compared with other prepared food suppliers, like restaurants, because the cost of rent and tools is often much lower. Additionally, street food vendors tend to buy their ingredients at the cheapest markets, making them competitive with the cost of home cooking.

The FAO also highlighted that street food consumption patterns are determined by availability and accessibility. In today’s world, people want to have food options close to their work, schools, or places they are visiting in order to save time and effort. Therefore, the target market for street food is not exclusive to poor countries or individuals with lower levels of income, but has become a part of the lifestyle in many locations. One of the ways that street food contributes to economic growth is through the tourism industry. Since locals mostly prepare street food, it reflects the culture and tradition of the community. Local food has become one of the attributes tourists use to select travel destinations, as it provides an added value to their experiences (Warshawsky & Vos, 2019; Dhillon, 2022).

Each destination has its own characteristic street food. According to Privitera and Nesci (2015), the Italian Association of Street Food established characteristics regarding the provision of street food, which include that the food respects history and traditions, uses ingredients from the local area, adopts ethical respect, uses traditional preparation tools, applies health regulations, combines nutrition with food, respects the environment, promotes the local area, and publishes information about street food on the web. Therefore, we can see that each country has its own street food representing the destination through diverse tastes, ingredients, and presentation methods.

Since food can be a symbol of a destination's identity and culture (Boyd 2015), part of tourists' experiences (Choe & Kim, 2018), and a symbol of its identity and culture (Boyd 2015), it is essential to view gastronomic tourism and street food as tourist attractions.

Gastronomic Tourism and Street Food

According to The World Health Organization (2010), food is classified based on There exists a widely recognized adage that suggests that in order to have a deeper understanding of a country's culture, one must engage in its culinary traditions (Sandybayev, 2018). Food tourism has grown tremendously and has become one of the most creative and dynamic parts of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2012). Gastronomy is a core part of culinary tourism, and this sector is growing in the tourism industry (Londoño, 2011). Therefore, tourist destinations and companies have realized the importance of gastronomy and the culinary arts to tourist decision making and motivation. Moreover, gastronomy tourism includes values related to ethics and sustainability, which rely on the earth, local products, local culture, and authenticity. The emergence of gourmet tourism has become a prominent trend in the tourist industry, reflecting a growing interest in culinary experiences among travelers (Sandybayev, 2018). Therefore, this chapter reviews gastronomy tourism's definition. Gastronomic or culinary tourism was defined by Hall and Mitchell (2015) as a type of tourism in which the ultimate reason to travel is food. While there are many terms used in literature to describe culinary tourism, including "gastronomic tourism," "gastro-tourism," and "food tourism," the commonly used term "gastronomic tourism" is defined as "being in pursuit of a unique experience of eating and drinking."

Gastronomy tourism encompasses the basic classifications of indigenous cuisines, which pertain to the distinctiveness of a meal and its inherent connection to a specific location, region, or nation (Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Groves, 2001; Green & Dogherty, 2008; Sormaz, 2016). Previous research has indicated that food tourism entails exploring culinary experiences at tourist destinations for recreational or entertainment purposes. This encompasses activities such as visiting food shops, attending food festivals and exhibitions, exploring farmer markets, sampling various food items, and engaging in other activities that revolve around the culinary offerings of a destination (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2015; Lee, Packer, Scott, 2015).

According to UNWTO (2012), the culinary offerings of a destination hold significant importance for tourists, alongside the overall quality of their vacation experience. Gastronomy tourism pertains to individuals or tourists who include in their trip itinerary the intention of experiencing the local food of a particular area or engaging in activities associated with gastronomy tourism or culinary arts. Moreover, according to UNWTO (2012), gastronomic routes have emerged as a prominent facet of gastronomy, offering tourists and customers the opportunity to sample diverse

culinary offerings and immerse themselves in local culture. Hence, gastronomy tourism offers a holistic tourism experience that transcends geographical boundaries. Furthermore, culinary itineraries facilitate the transportation of tourists to prominent tourist destinations by incorporating a fusion of gastronomic experiences that cater to the preferences and desires of both tourists and visitors. This includes the opportunity to sample distinctive dishes that serve as emblematic representations of the local culture and are highly regarded by the indigenous population.

People who travel to experience eating and drinking particular (often local) produce are generally engaged in culinary tourism, which is mostly a domestic travel activity. In general, the concept of food tourism pertains to those who are driven by their desire for culinary encounters. According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization website, 17% of American leisure travelers participated in food-related activities. Therefore, gastronomic tourism is one of the significant tourism patterns that contribute to attracting tourists and the economy's growth. For example, even though you can find pasta and pizza served all over Italy, some cities and regions are known for having the most authentic version of a dish. This is true even of the most well-known gastronomic tourism destinations, such as Italy, where each region has a very specific cuisine (Nistor E-L. & Dezsi, 2022). According to Sims (2009), food tourism often offers tourists authentic and engaging experiences. In contrast to traditional forms of tourism, food tourism involves the acquisition of unique and lasting cultural experiences through gastronomic encounters (Chen & Huang, 2018).

Street food plays a crucial role in the culinary tourism sector, providing an opportunity for tourists to experience authentic local cuisine and deeply engage with the cultural atmosphere of the destination (Mitgosoom & Ashton, 2019). Street food has the potential to serve as a means of enticing tourists to a particular location by providing them with an opportunity to partake in the consumption of authentic local cuisine. Street food, via the utilization of locally available materials, encompasses the intrinsic traditional principles and cultural genuineness of a region, thereby fostering the advancement of the local economy and building a sustainable foundation for tourism. According to Jeaheng and Han (2020), this system offers opportunities that contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourist sites. According to Mnguni, Muzobanzi, and Giampiccoli (2022), street cuisine exemplifies a strong association with the immediate surroundings and offers a transient and fresh culinary encounter. Tourists who visit popular attractions have the potential to create lasting memories by indulging in locally produced and sourced cuisine, with a special emphasis on street food (Dhillon, 2022). In addition, the presence of street food attracts tourists who are interested in experiencing various culinary offerings, immersing themselves in local culture, and exploring diverse flavors. The inclusion of street food in the tourist experience can enhance it by offering an opportunity to savor authentic local cuisine prepared and served in an informal outdoor setting.

The potential influence of street food on the visitor experience encompasses the promotion of cultural awareness and local customs, as well as the potential to enhance the quality of life within the local community through job creation and increased revenues. Street food is not merely a fad among consumers but

rather a cultural phenomenon that caters to individuals seeking affordable meal options, offering them the flexibility to eat at their convenience and allowing them to experience and appreciate the unique flavors associated with a particular destination's ethnic cuisine (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). The social and cultural significance of street food, along with its convenience, affordability, accessibility, and palatability, attracts tourists (Yeap et al., 2019). Street food is widely acknowledged as a fundamental element of a society's gastronomy, functioning as a repository of indigenous culinary traditions and playing a significant role in expanding the tourism sector (Choudhury et al., 2011).

There are famous destinations that offer street food to tourists to experience local food, such as China, Turkey, Egypt, India, Malaysia, and Thailand. According to the Statista Website, regarding the number of street food businesses, Thailand had roughly 111,000 street food enterprises in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Thailand has also been recognized as one of the leading culinary destinations globally, securing a position among the top 10 destinations (Li, 2021). In India, which has the world's highest population in 2023, with more than 1.43 billion people (World Population Review, 2023), it is estimated that there are around 10 million street vendors all over the country (D'Cruz, 2021), including suppliers of vegetables, fruits, bread, eggs, tea, and any other type of food that can be provided on the street. A previous study gave an insight into food preferences by tourists and identified 18 street food preferences for street food in India, such as Tandoori Chicken tikka (Gupta, Sajani & Gupta, 2020).

In such large countries and in crowded areas, the maintenance of food hygiene is an essential component in the manufacturing and preparation of street food, especially in underdeveloped nations where there is a high prevalence of foodborne illnesses and associated fatalities (Prevorsek et al., 2021; Shafiee et al., 2017). However, there are issues that are raised due to the food safety and regulations of street food. The hygienic conditions of street food are significantly compromised due to various factors, including inadequate food storage practices, improper food heating procedures, cross-contamination between raw and processed food, inappropriate cooking methods, insufficient food covering, and the utilization of food additives (Chang et al., 2020; Cho et al., 2020).

Issues and Challenges Related to Street Food

Street food is considered less healthy, even if it is affordable and quick to prepare. Many customers worry that eating too much street food might lead to heart disease, diabetes, and obesity because of its high fat, salt, and generally high-calorie content (Musaiger, 2014; Chang, Chu, & Shahril, 2016). An essential component of eating is food quality (Othman, 2020). When there is a decline in food quality, it can result in the transmission of diseases, which impacts the lives of both residents and customers, as exemplified by cases of food poisoning. The FAO highlighted the problems of street foods, which include "contamination, poor hygiene, not a

recognized industry, lack of social status, complex or non-existent licensing systems, ineffective and arbitrary inspection, and traffic congestion". One of the main issues with community health today is the safety of food found on the streets, particularly after the proliferation of viruses like COVID-19 (Abd El-Latif & Abouelenein, 2020). Therefore, street food could face challenges due to customers' increased awareness regarding food safety.

Tourists may also exhibit a reluctance to partake in street food activities during their visits to popular tourist destinations. A recent study by Ratasuk (2023) examined the effects of food hygiene on purchase intentions in the context of Bangkok Street Food, with a particular focus on the post-COVID-19 period. The study revealed a significant relationship between customers' perception of food hygiene and their intention to purchase. Also, the research showed that individuals exhibit heightened sensitivity, concern, and vigilance toward matters related to health and well-being. Notably, implementing appropriate food hygiene practices, supported by evidence such as the operator's personal hygiene, food handling procedures, and the overall environmental conditions, instills a significant sense of security among customers.

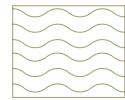
Habib (2016) conducted a study on the challenges faced by street food vendors in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. The study found that a range of factors, such as insufficient education, training, and experience, along with a lack of institutional support, collectively present substantial barriers for these vendors in maintaining food safety. This phenomenon can increase the risk of contracting foodborne illnesses stemming from contamination, as well as decrease confidence in the safety and reliability of street-sourced food. In order to foster confidence in purchasing and consuming street food, it is imperative to provide customers with pertinent information and increase their understanding of the risks involved in street food consumption. This can be achieved through the display of Health Certificates and permits, which can give consumers a sense of confidence in the security and lack of risk associated with the food they acquire from merchants, consequently ensuring the preservation of their personal health and overall welfare. In order to ensure the preservation of street food as an integral component of gourmet tourism within a secure and hygienic setting, it becomes imperative to implement stringent regulations pertaining to the minimum standards for food quality. Providing vendors with comprehensive training on the proper handling, preparation, and storage of food items is of utmost importance. Consequently, organisations are advised to acquire the appropriate certification to demonstrate their adherence to these defined standards.

With the development of the food and culinary sector in Saudi Arabia, this chapter would benefit the industry by considering the role of gastronomy in tourist destinations, the importance of setting regulations regarding food safety, and the influence of street food on the tourist experience.

05 Co-creation of Gastronomic Food Experiences

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Introduction

Co-creation and gastronomy are not new concepts, but they have recently received increased attention from researchers, policy makers, and managers due to tourists' growing desire to play an active role in creating their own travel experiences. An experience can be defined as a steady flow of feelings and thoughts that an individual gains during conscious moments (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Food can be a central part of travel and destination discovery, and tourists may seek to try local dishes at specialised festivals or to learn about original food preparation practices.

Competition between tourist destinations is increasing dramatically, which has led to them to differentiate themselves from each other through marketing gastronomic experiences. Gastronomic experiences became a valuable source of new activities that attract tourists, and gastronomy is a crucial factor in influencing tourists' decisions to select a destination (López-Guzmán et al., 2017). The UNWTO (2019) defines gastronomic tourism as visitors' experiences that are linked with food-related products and activities while travelling. Co-creation is an effective strategy that enables visitors to be involved in a food experience. According to Eraqi (2011) and Zouni and Kouremenos (2008), co-creation involves tourists' participation in the consumption, design, and production of an experience. One popular example of co-created gastronomic food experience is "cooking classes". During this experience visitors usually learn about the history of local dishes, local ingredients and local cooking methods (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019).

In this chapter, co-creation is discussed under activities that take place during the visitor's interaction and active participation with others during the food experience. This chapter aims to: 1) highlight the importance of co-creation in gastronomic

food experience; 2) discuss how co-creation could enhance visitors' experiences of gastrotourism and create lasting memories; 3) the importance of co-creation as a marketing tool; and 4) provide examples of co-creation gastronomic food experiences in Saudi Arabia.

What is a Co-creation Experience?

Co-production and value-in-use are two forms of customer co-creation (Kristensson et al., 2008; Lusch and Vargo, 2006). The former refers to the "joint creation of value by the company and the customer, allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit her context" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; p. 8). Visitors can participate in value co-creation during gastronomic experiences by participating in the process of food creation, for example, or through cooperative interactions (Luo et al., 2019) and it is increasingly important to involve visitors in this process. The latter refers to the "phenomenological experience perceived by a customer interacting with products/services bundles in use situations" (Woodruff and Flint, 2006, p. 185). According to Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012), customers' perceptions of value-in-use are influenced by the level of their involvement, interaction, and engagement with service providers during the consumption process.

Visitors are expected to produce and retain unique value based on their level of participation during the encounter with a service provider or dining experience (Chan et al., 2010). During gastronomic food experience, visitors have to be present and participate in the creation of the experience. Therefore, it can be said that gastronomic food experiences are co-created and embodied experiences. Using customer co-creation has multiple advantages, such as achieving higher levels of customer value, increasing customer satisfaction, and enhancing employee job satisfaction and performance (Chan et al., 2010; Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012), thus helping businesses set themselves apart from competitors by raising the standard in which they deliver the same service offerings (Chathoth et al., 2013).

What is Gastronomic Food Experience?

Food and drink consumption, for many travellers, is a main component of their experience. Gastronomic food experiences are a significant component of visitors' lived experiences which focus on food flavour, history, culture, and environment. Gillespie and Cousins (2015) regarded gastronomy as the art and science of cooking, and the pleasure of eating and drinking by stimulating different senses. Others regard gastronomy as the link between culture and food. The gastronomic food experience therefore involves more than simple food consumption. The interactions that occur between tourists and hosts in various destinations, or between customers and waiters at restaurants are also vital in creating memorable experiences.

Gajić et al. (2022) note that gastronomic food experiences allow visitors to become deeply aware of local traditions, everyday culture, and the travel destination's true values and spirit. The quality of the gastronomy on offer plays an important role in helping restaurants or hotels, and even the destination as a whole, to survive and thrive in the tourist and service provision markets (Gajić et al., 2022). According to Agyeiwaah et al. (2019), based on the nature of involvement in the experience, gastronomic tourism consumption that is related to food can be categorised into three classes: observational (e.g. food shows), experiential (e.g. cooking classes), and participatory (e.g. partially preparing the food). Gastronomic food experiences influence tourists' choice of overall experience, satisfaction, and intention to revisit (Guruge 2020; Kim et al., 2013; Kim and Eves, 2012). They are also cultural experiences through which visitors can learn about the characteristics of the host country or location.

The Influence of Co-creation in Gastronomy Experience

Co-creation in gastronomic food experiences enables visitors to be a part of the experience rather than be mere observers, addressing an increased demand for more interactive and participative programmes and activities. Indulging in a gastronomic experience enhances visitors' curiosity about the local way of life and helps them draw meaning from their trip.

Social interactions are a main component of tourism experiences (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Using co-creation in gastronomic food experience enables visitors to have a social experience through their interaction with local people, service providers, and other visitors sharing the same experience. Therefore, co-creation can increase visitors' interactions with the environment, local people, and the activities pertaining to the specific experience. Solomon et al. (1985) stated that social reciprocal exchanges take place between customers and employees during service interactions. Customer participation is defined as "the degree to which the customer is involved in producing and delivering the service" (Dabholkar, 2015, p. 484). Visitors' participation could increase their positive perceptions of the local food they enjoy as well as the educational benefits they gain from their visit, and is also more likely to increase the memorability of their experience.

It is expected that visitors will think about the culture, ingredients, and presentation of the food when participating in gastrotourism, leading to an intellectual experience that is described as a situation that arouses someone's interest and gets them thinking (Lee & Kang, 2012). When customers engage in creative thinking, the experience becomes more active than emotional (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Co-creation in gastronomic food experience is a good way to provide a sensory experience, defined as an experience through which customers are influenced by a stimulus to one or more of their senses (Bagby, 2009; Hedström, et al., 2015). Visitors are expected to taste, touch, smell the food. Sensory experiences engage customers' senses and influence their judgement, perceptions, and

behaviours (Krishna, 2012). Therefore, it is expected that a co-creation experience would positively increase the enjoyment of visitors' gastronomic food experience at destinations.

Tourists often seek novelty in their experiences, which Jang and Feng (2007, p.582) described as "curiosity drive, sensation seeking, and an exploratory drive." Novelty is experienced when customers observe something new or different (Duman & Mattila, 2005). Tourists may judge their gastronomic experiences based on "unique" aspects of the particular destination's gastronomy (Hjalager & Richards, 2003) and novel gastronomic experiences—particularly co-creation activities where they are exposed to the ingredients and can actively contribute to the creation of the final dish—may pique customers' interests and motivate them to try the food.

Co-creation in Gastronomic Food Experience as a Marketing Tool

Food experiences that offer possibilities for visitors to engage actively, such as through cooking, or passively, such as through observation, have the potential to enhance visitors' intentions to participate in said experience and enhance their overall satisfaction. These experiential opportunities hold strategic significance and present valuable marketing prospects for destinations.

The authenticity of a destination's gastronomic dining experience is significant for its marketing efforts. The active involvement of visitors in the co-creation process has the potential to boost their perception of the experience's authenticity, facilitate what they learn from it, and increase their intention to visit a destination. Numerous destinations across the globe have recognized the importance of authenticity and have subsequently embarked on promoting themselves as genuine gastronomic attractions. However, the role of involving visitors in co-creation experiences needs more attention from destination experience designers. The practice of co-creation in gastronomic experiences has a higher probability of enhancing the tourists' affinity towards local gastronomy, local culture, and their overall absorption in the destination's culture. Additionally, it facilitates a deeper understanding of the local food and cultures.

Destinations that offer co-created gastronomic food experiences have the potential to develop a positive image for these areas. Crompton (1979) noted that the concept of a destination image can be defined as the collection of memories, facts, and perceptions that travellers form about a certain destination. The destination consists of cognitive and affective images which play an important role in tourists' destination selections (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The incorporation of distinctive gastronomy experiences has the potential to enhance the perception of a location and serve as an influential instrument in destination marketing efforts (Fox, 2007). Co-creation requires a high level of involvement that relies on customer participation in a gastronomic experience. During this participation a series of interactions will take

place which will help visitors to learn more about how local culture would influence food gastronomy.

Gastronomy, Co-creation, and Memorability

Memories are the result of an individual's encounter with a particular event or situation, and the collaborative process of co-creating gastronomic food experiences may have a significant impact on the memorability of such encounters. The concept of "memorable experience" has been defined as "the tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred" (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012, p. 13). The gastronomic food experience, co-creation, and memories serve as significant souvenirs that tourists acquire during their visit to a particular destination. Gastronomic food experience is consciously connected with memory through emotions, as well as affective, cognitive, and sensorial features. The degree to which an encounter is experientially stimulating directly correlates with its memorability. Thus, when a gastronomic food experience gives visitors an opportunity to participate and co-create, this experience is more likely to stay longer in visitors' memory.

According to Kim et al (2012), individuals are more inclined to recall certain food experience dimensions—namely novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, hedonism, participation, and knowledge—when they perceive an event as being memorable. The process of co-creation is expected to enhance the level of engagement among visitors and service providers, thereby facilitating the sensory experiences of smell and taste, which are known to contribute to the overall memorability of the experience. The pleasant memories associated with gastronomic food encounters play a significant role in evoking favourable emotional responses among visitors (Manosuthi et al., 2021). Moreover, such experiences contribute to the overall satisfaction they derive from their travels (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017), foster a sense of attachment to the destination (Tsai, 2016), and influence visitors' cognitive, affective, and behavioural intentions (Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2022).

The best way to enhance visitors' memorability of a particular experience is by allowing them to be a part of the production, design, and consumption of the experience. According to Andrades and Dimanche (2018) "the end goal of a tourist experience is to create lasting memories that a visitor will reminisce about and will share in respective social networks" (p. 18). The experiences sought by visitors at a destination are influenced by the activities they engage in (Poulssohn & Kale, 2004), and vivid memories are part of the experience (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Co-creation in gastronomic food experiences is expected to enhance the physical and the mental engagement in a gastronomic food experience which will ultimately increase the memorability of the experience. It requires active participation, attention to detail, and interaction, all of which positively increase memorability (Brunner-Sperdi et al., 2012).

Gastronomy, Co-creation, and Affective Experience

It is anticipated that the practice of co-creation in gastronomy experiences will elicit emotional reactions, including but not limited to enjoyment, pleasure, fulfilment, and contentment. Being a part of a gastronomic food experience will undoubtedly evoke emotions that may affect visitors' behavioural intentions. The term "affective experience" reflects the visitor's emotions/feelings generated during an experience (Han et al., 2018). Hsu et al., (2022) defined the affective gastronomy experience as "the set of tourists' emotional responses generated while consuming food or beverages and participating in food-related activities in the travel destination" (p. 3278). Emotion that is evoked during a gastronomic food experience significantly influences visitors' evaluation of the experience (Hosany et al., 2015). According to Promnil (2021), it is advantageous for destinations to establish a thriving gastronomy site that serves as the central offering for facilitating emotive experiences. It is conceivable that individuals visiting a co-creation gastronomy establishment may experience certain emotions (e.g. excitement) prior to their participation, which could potentially influence their behavioural intentions. Tung & Ritchie (2011) found that emotions positively influence post-experience behavioural intentions (e.g. intention to revisit or spread positive word of mouth about the experience).

Application of Co-creation Gastronomic Food Experience in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia opened its doors to tourists back in 2019; nevertheless, the country remains an unexplored treasure for numerous individuals. Saudi Arabia comprises 13 distinct regions, each of which boasts its own unique gastronomic offerings. The involvement of visitors in the co-creation of gastronomic food experiences can significantly contribute to the enhancement of their memorability, cultural connection, evocation of favourable emotions, and the promotion of positive behavioural intentions such as satisfaction, positive word of mouth, and intention to revisit. The country hosts many food-related festivals, such as the Flavour and Food Culture Festival, Saudi Feast Food Festival, among others. During these festivals, it is imperative to provide visitors with a co-creation experience in gastronomy, enabling them to fully engage and immerse themselves in the event. This approach aims to evoke positive feelings and foster the creation of unforgettable experiences for the participants. Additionally, it is imperative for restaurateurs to consider implementing design experiences that facilitate visitor participation and co-creation. The architectural layout of restaurants can facilitate a co-creation encounter, where patrons can engage in the culinary preparation process through observation.

This paragraph will suggest some co-created experience with traditional dishes that can be provided to visitors in the future to enhance their gourmet experience in Saudi Arabia through co-creation. Tourists visiting Asser, a region situated in the southern part of Saudi Arabia, can have the opportunity to actively participate in the

preparation of a traditional dessert called “Areeka.” This signature dish of Aseer is made by combining whole wheat baked bread with ghee, honey, and dates. Visitors can engage in the co-creation process by observing the various stages involved in making the dish or by exerting control over the quantity of honey or dates used in its preparation. Visitors can have the opportunity to engage in collaborative baking activities, including the preparation of “Al Mefa Bread,” a culinary creation derived from a diverse assortment of grains. During this process, visitors are encouraged to actively participate in the shaping of the dough, employing the traditional technique employed by local inhabitants, resulting in the formation of elongated oval loaves. Additionally, the preparation of Saudi coffee can provide visitors an exceptional gastronomic co-creation experience

06

Food and Drink Trails and Tours

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The Concept of Food and Drink Routes and Trails

There is a dearth of literature dedicated to food trail tourism (Carson & Cartan, 2011). However, other academic disciplines contribute to the investigation of this phenomenon, including culinary tourism, touring route tourism, and food trail management (Hasim et al., 2020). Food trails serve as a strategic tool for destination marketing, with the aim of augmenting visitor numbers and promoting diverse goods and/or producers within a particular region or locale (Everett, 2016). There is not one agreed-upon description of what a food trail is, although scholars have provided some definitions. It is possible to describe a trail as a narrow linear path that is primarily intended for people to travel for recreational purposes (Marsh, 2004). Medina and Tresserras (2018) defined the trail as a path that follows in the footsteps of both the food and the people who ate it, as well as an adventure where you can enjoy both.

The most crucial concern that may arise in relation to a food trail is how to experience it fully. There are various ways to experience a trail, including going on a bus trip, walking excursions of local markets and restaurants, or engaging in self-guided tours (Broadway, 2019). They often begin with the aim of strengthening collaboration between local food producers and the tourism industry to attract more visitors and support rural economic development. Food and beverage trails can be seen as a type of itinerary tourism. These routes are often self-guided and include some level of formal organisation and preparation. They aim to bring together many places with a food-related theme, offering a cohesive and comprehensive experience for visitors. These trails provide a holistic culinary and gastronomic narrative that explores the interconnectedness of individuals, processes, locales, and products (Timothy and Boyd, 2015).

One example of impactful food routes is the spice trade, which influenced cross-cultural exchange. First, the ancient spice trade had a long history, tracing its origins

back to antiquity. Spices such as cinnamon, pepper, and ginger held significant importance throughout ancient times, prompting extensive trade routes spanning the Middle East and Asia.

Second, the Silk Road, built between the 2nd century BC and 14th century AD, was a complex network of commercial routes that facilitated the connection between China and the Mediterranean region (Mishra, 2020). This extensive network played a crucial role in enabling the flow of various commodities and intellectual concepts between Eastern and Western civilizations. Spices constituted a highly prized category of goods that were exchanged as commodities of significant value throughout the historical trading network known as the Silk Road.

Third, the involvement of Arab traders in the spice trade was significant, since they served as mediators facilitating commerce between Asian producers and European customers (Shimada, 2019)—the transportation of spices from India to the Middle East and Europe was facilitated by Arab traders.

Fourth, during the 15th century, Portuguese explorers initiated expeditions with the objective of discovering alternative trade routes to Asia. In due course, a direct maritime pathway from Europe to Asia was successfully built, circumventing the involvement of Arab traders and facilitating European merchants' access to the lucrative spice trade.

Fifth, the Dutch East India Company emerged as a prominent entity in the spice trade throughout the 17th century, effectively gaining a monopoly on the commerce of nutmeg and cloves in the Moluccas region (archipelago in eastern Indonesia).

Finally, the spice trade exerted a substantial influence on cultural interaction by fostering the convergence of individuals from many regions and enabling the interchange of concepts, commodities, and technology. The introduction of spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg to Europe had a significant influence on European cuisine, resulting in the emergence of novel culinary creations and the exploration of diverse taste profiles. The spice routes exerted a significant influence on the trajectory of global history and facilitated the intertwining of diverse cultures across various geographical areas.

Food and Drink Trails and Routes Worldwide

Prior to compiling a list of the most renowned routes and trails for food and drink, it is first essential to establish methods for locating the most pleasurable food and drink trails. The Internet is currently one of the most effective resources for researching culinary locations and sites. Jacobs' (2010) carried out an exhaustive study on the characteristics of websites associated with food and drink trails. The research encompassed sixteen countries and identified the attributes of the most effective culinary trails websites, which may have practical implications for contemporary

technologies like smartphone applications. The author found the following characteristics as most effective:

- A clear intention to teach people who might use the product about its historical, artistic, and cultural background.
- A clear brand with simple, easy-to-remember images, like the growing agreement for wine route signs.
- A catchy slogan or phrase that fits with its theme, like “savour the flavours”.
- High-quality photos, artwork, videos and music clips that appeal to a lot of different senses at once.
- A way for modern communication using different audio/video players, that can be downloaded, and broadcasted.
- Strong connections with activities that work well together.
- The incorporation of product details, such as a schedule of upcoming events and the publication of culinary instructions.
- Hooks like membership that give members the latest news about the product and location and make them feel like they’re part of a team.
- Maps that are easy to download and take with you.
- A list of culinary events that will happen.
- A highly efficient search engine for site exploration.
- Putting together planned routes that meet the needs of all trail users.
- The allure of uncommon or distinctive food items.

In order to optimise the efficacy of food and drink trail routes, it is imperative to draw insights from global examples and comprehend the strategies they employ to entice tourists and visitors to their respective locales. Below are some of the most well-known food trails across the globe:

Neck of the Woods Trail - North California, USA

The High Country of North Carolina is situated within the eastern region of the United States known as Appalachia. This particular area is renowned for its production of handmade jams, farmstead cheeses, fresh apple cakes, and sour corn. The Neck of the Woods taste trail offers a range of gastronomic experiences, encompassing various establishments such as “you-pick” farms and cider houses (Neck of the Woods, 2023), which share a common characteristic: a deep appreciation for the local tradition. The interactive web map of Neck of the Woods has over 100 companies, each of which is colour-coded according to categories such as farm-to-table eating or vineyards and wineries. This categorisation facilitates the creation of self-guided tours for visitors. Notable destinations encompass Spruce Pine’s Tin Shed at Soggy Bottom Farms, renowned for its slow-roasted BBQ pork sandwiches and delectable pies packed with buttermilk, pecan, and berries. Additionally,

Mitchell's Oak Moon Farm & Creamery, a micro-dairy that specialises in the production of small-batch, raw milk goat cheese, stands out as another noteworthy stop along the way.

Apple Pie Trail – Ontario, Canada

The Canadian province of Ontario offers a culinary exploration opportunity known as the Apple Pie Trail. This trail encompasses the Apple Country region and features a downloadable map that highlights 40 designated locations situated in South Georgian Bay, adjacent to Lake Huron (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2015). Each of these regions is closely linked to the esteemed apple cultivation sector that has been in existence since the 19th century. The region offers a variety of attractions, including rural markets, breweries, and notable establishments such as Collingwood's Heavenly Cafe, which is renowned for its delectable caramel apple cinnamon buns. These buns are considered a must-try for visitors exploring the Apple Pie Trail. In addition to providing a self-guided map, the Apple Pie Trail website offers information on nearby accommodations, events, and activities like snowshoeing excursions and winery tours. These resources aim to enhance apple-themed road trips by transforming them into immersive weekend experiences.

Beer Cheese Trail - Kentucky, USA

Beer cheese is a renowned culinary tradition in the state of Kentucky, United States. This delectable spread is made by combining cheese, flat beer, Worcestershire sauce, and spicy sauce, infused with a medley of spices. It is commonly enjoyed over crackers, pretzels, or raw vegetables. It is widely thought that Johnny Allman's restaurant in Kentucky was the initial establishment to introduce beer cheese in the 1940s (Ludwick & Hess, 2019). However, it is important to note that the exact origins of this dissemination remain uncertain. Nevertheless, it is evident that beer cheese has since gained recognition as a distinctive culinary specialty within the region.

The uniqueness of beer cheeses becomes evident when exploring Kentucky's Beer Cheese Trail, a self-guided itinerary that showcases about eight establishments including cafés, sports bars, restaurants, and marketplaces located in Winchester and Clark counties. Visitors can indulge in delectable options such as a beer cheese platter or a grilled beer cheese panini, and obtain a stamp on their "Cheese Log" trail guide to obtain a commemorative T-shirt. They also have the opportunity to be selected as a judge for the beer cheese festival held annually in Winchester during the month of June.

Donut Trail – Ohio, USA

The Donut Trail, a culinary trail consisting of 10 stops located in the state of Ohio's Butler County, has gained significant popularity due to the sheer delightfulness of its donuts (Schaller, 2021). Whether they are filled with custard, covered in chocolate, or topped with sprinkles, donuts have captivated the taste buds of many individuals. The present route, characterised by its interactive nature and reliance on sugar as a fuel source, traverses the southwestern region of the state, establishing connections

between various establishments specialising in donuts, pastries, and bakeries. Notable examples include Milton's Donuts, renowned for their Fruity Pebble donuts, and Kelly's Bakery, which offers maple-bacon Long Johns, a term denoting the bar-shaped configuration of said donuts. By successfully visiting all ten designated locations outlined in the official Donut Trail Passport, participants are eligible to receive a prestigious Donut Trail accolade.

Cheese Trail- California, USA

If driving around the state of California while consuming cheese is one's idea of an ideal outing, then this trail is the perfect choice. The primary objective of The Cheese Trail, a non-profit organisation, is to promote artisan cheesemakers and family farmers within the state of California. This is achieved via a range of initiatives such as organised tours, educational workshops, and other events. The California cheese trail provides visitors with valuable information, including connections to cheese-making seminars in the state and websites offering home cheese-making materials. These tools enable anyone to engage in the process of cheese creation on their own. Consumers can leverage their enhanced understanding of cheese to develop a deeper appreciation for the laborious processes involved in crafting artisanal cheese or rearing dairy animals (Gullen, 2015). These endeavours are designed to raise awareness, foster appreciation, and provide support to individuals and businesses involved in the production of artisanal cheese and the cultivation of agricultural products in the region commonly referred to as the Golden State.

There are nine recommended self-guided driving tours, such as the Central Valley route which starts with a Dutch family renowned for their expertise in producing gouda cheese and operating an open-air petting zoo. The North Coast route provides access to three artisanal cheese makers situated between breathtaking coastal vistas and majestic redwood trees. The initial suggested destination is Pennyroyal Farm, where visitors have the opportunity to partake in tastings of both cheese and wine. It is worth noting that one of the co-owners of Pennyroyal Farm is affiliated with Navarro Winery in the Anderson Valley. Additional trails provide detailed information for visiting farms that are difficult to identify, featuring establishments situated in old barns where visitors may sample and acquire various types of cheeses and picnic provisions. The user-friendly website includes a downloadable map of all the cheese-related sites on the trail.

Northern Rivers Harvest Food Trail - New South Wales, Australia

Byron Bay is commonly associated with its coastal landscapes, although it should be noted that the region also encompasses rainforests and rich valleys, rendering it a prominent destination for agritourism. The Northern Rivers Harvest Food Trail showcases a plethora of sustainable farms, orchards, and food producers offering a diverse range of products, including fruits, honey, cheeses, and coffee (Berry et al., 2023). Despite the annual advertising weekend organised by the Trail team, individuals have the flexibility to curate their own trail experience by selecting certain farmers and food artisans to visit. One may also allocate a whole day to The Farm

Byron Bay, an establishment encompassing a multitude of small enterprises that actively promote environmental sustainability and foster practices conducive to well-being. The expansive 80-acre farm, in accordance with its guiding principle of “grow, feed, educate, give back,” encompasses diverse gardens and a population of freely roaming animals. Additionally, it offers a variety of products for sale, including artisan bread items, fresh vegetables, floral arrangements, gelato, and a selection of seedlings available for purchase at the garden shed, allowing visitors to cultivate their own plants at home.

Burren Food Trail, County Clare, Ireland

The verdant landscapes and unpolluted bodies of water in Ireland make it an optimal setting for the cultivation of agricultural produce and the preservation of food-related customs. The Burren Food Trail stands out among the several self-guided paths available in the area (Hogan et al., 2012). This distinctive area of western Ireland is renowned for its karst limestone geological formation, estimated to be 300 million years old. It is recommended that visitors dedicate a day or two to traversing the picturesque and narrow rural routes, while making stops at several, independently-owned enterprises that specialise in selling regional delicacies, including seafood, chocolate, goat cheeses, and free-range hog creations. Every member on the trail has undergone a thorough evaluation process to ensure adherence to quality standards and a strong dedication to fostering a sustainable future for the region. Furthermore, they are prepared and eager to engage in conversations with guests. One additional advantage of visiting the Burren region is its close proximity to outdoor hiking opportunities at the Cliffs of Moher and Burren National Park. This area has been designated as an officially recognized geopark by UNESCO. It is widely acknowledged as the sole location on the planet where alpine, arctic, and Mediterranean flora coexist in close proximity.

The Advantages of Trails, Routes, and Connected Producers

The implementation of organized trails provides tourist planners with the opportunity to effectively market a pre-existing cuisine or regional specialty while minimising financial expenditure. This approach capitalises on the already established network of producers and suppliers and leverages existing infrastructure. Trails contribute to the stimulation of local economies as they provide tourists the chance to engage in the purchase and consumption of food products that are locally sourced. In addition, they contribute to the preservation and perpetuation of traditional methods employed in the manufacturing and processing of artisanal cuisine. From a tourist standpoint, the provision of opportunities to partake in locally sourced, superior quality cuisine serves to enrich their overall experience, heighten their knowledge and understanding of a particular location, and cultivate both first and subsequent visits. The culinary reputation of a place can be elevated through the introduction of food tours. Charisia and Maria (2022) believe that the use of food tours as a technique to promote culinary tourism has the potential to establish synergies with the local agri-food industry. These synergies may help local authorities build an appealing

gastronomic profile for the destination, while also providing tourists with one-of-a-kind gastronomic experiences.

The Taste Trail of Isle of Arran Case Study

During the late 1990s, a project known as the Arran Taste Trail was established in Scotland with the aim of strengthening the connections between the local food and tourist sectors on the island (Broadway, 2019). The creators of the trail, namely the Regional Development Authority in the local area, received funds from the European Union's LEADER program. Their primary objective was to enhance the island's reputation as a tourism hotspot by highlighting the exceptional calibre of its local eateries and agricultural products. A handbook was disseminated for commercial purposes, including detailed profiles of member restaurants, food producers, and merchants who are dedicated to the promotion of locally sourced food of superior quality. According to the findings of a reader poll, it was observed that around 90% of the respondents expressed their willingness to allocate more financial resources towards the purchase of locally sourced food subsequent to their perusal of the handbook.

Located in the Firth of Clyde on the west coast of Scotland, the island of Arran has an area of 43,201 hectares and is accessible via a boat ride of about 21.5 kilometres (or about an hour) from the mainland port of Ardrossan (Ramsay, 2011). The Isle of Arran Taste Trail is a specialised attraction that focuses on the high quality of local gastronomy and products. The Trail showcases individuals involved in the cultivation, production, marketing, and utilisation of high-quality island products. It promotes collaboration across various sectors to improve the overall tourist experience and foster economic interconnections from the first stages of production to the final point of sale. The primary objective of the trail is to promote extended stays, wider distribution, and future return visits among tourists to the island. In addition to the growing influx of tourists, the trail also seeks to provide educational opportunities for visitors on the characteristics, accessibility, and applications of locally sourced food. This initiative intends to enrich their experience on the island and further establish Arran as a prominent destination renowned for its abundant supply of superior food products (Boyne et al., 2003).

To conclude, the taste trail successfully uses a guidebook that showcases individuals involved in the cultivation, production, sale, and preparation of the finest local produce on the island. It also promotes collaborative efforts inside and beyond the local tourist and food business sectors. The trail effectively encompasses both the production and consumption elements of the interconnections between tourism and food.

07 Destination Gastronomic Identity and Tourists Satisfaction

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Introduction

The cultural elements of a destination are among the factors that tourists target and which often influence their travel decisions. Among these cultural elements are food and gastronomy. Tourists can be divided into those seeking novelty and those seeking familiarity. For novelty seekers, the local dishes of a tourist destination are attractive for the new experiences they can provide. In contrast, familiarity-seekers choose destinations where they can find dishes familiar to them, whether due to cultural proximity in the cuisines or the presence of the dishes in their home countries. In recent years, numerous gastronomic destinations have emerged, and cultural tourism patterns focused on eating and tasting have evolved. Consequently, researchers' interest in gastronomic tourism has increased, as they have sought to understand tourist behaviour and the role of local dishes in attracting visitors.

Long (2004) defines gastronomic tourism as exploring culture and history through food-related activities, which in turn create unforgettable tourist experiences. Thus, gastronomic tourists seek new restaurants, local tastes, and unique dining experiences. According to Hall and Sharples (2003), gastronomic tourism is an experiential journey to a geographical area known for its traditional foods, for the purpose of recreation and enjoyment. It includes visits to food preparation sites, festivals, fairs, farmers' events, local markets, and other food-related activities. The food experience is no longer seen as an incidental experience for tourists; it is deeply rooted in the tourists' pursuit of novelty, uniqueness, sensation-seeking, and their exploration of the host culture. Although it is acknowledged that food is now considered an essential element of the tourist experience and can serve as a primary travel motivator, it remains on the periphery of tourism research. This chapter conceptualises the potential impact of gastronomic identity on tourist satisfaction across emerging destinations in Saudi Arabia that vary culturally, mainly with respect to traditional foods.

Literature Review

Gastronomic tourism, an emergent niche within the broader tourism industry, refers to the pursuit of unique and memorable culinary experiences that extend beyond mere sustenance to encompass cultural and recreational activities (Hall & Sharples, 2003). It is worth noting that there is a dearth of literature on this topic concerning the Arab region, specifically the Arabian Gulf area, of which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest and most culturally diverse country. This section presents a literature review that synthesises current research on the subject, highlighting the multifaceted nature of food tourism and its implications for destination marketing and local economies.

In today's consumer-driven market, where travellers' preferences can make or break a product, it is imperative for businesses to deeply understand and cater to the desires, necessities, and motivations of their clientele. Many tourists gravitate towards familiar foods, though some are adventurous and seek out more exotic fare (Richards, 2002). The consumption of local foods while travelling is influenced by tourists' personal preferences as well as attributes of the local cuisine like methods of preparation, diversity, novelty, authenticity, and quality (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). With consumers playing an increasingly active role in shaping new products and services, understanding their wishes, needs, and motivations is crucial for the strategic market placement of various food items (Gagic, Jovičić, Tešanović, & Kalenjuk, 2014).

The gastronomic image of a destination is complex and influenced by various factors, including the quality of local restaurants, the portrayal of food in consumer-generated media, and the cultural associations of regional cuisine (Horng & Tsai, 2010; Jang, 2017). Frochot (2003) and Okumus et al. (2018) have explored the role of food in expressing cultural identity, finding that regional positioning and national cuisine significantly contribute to the tourism image of a country. This is further corroborated by Karim & Chi (2010), who demonstrated the correlation between a favourable food image and increased tourist purchasing intentions.

The intricate relationship between food image, satisfaction, and the quality of culinary experiences has been examined by Chi et al. (2013), who found that food image directly influences food satisfaction and tourists' behavioural intentions through the quality of culinary experiences. This indicates the potential for local food to enhance the tourism experience. However, studies such as those by Beer (2008) and Eren and Celik (2017) suggest that a country's gastronomic image can be undervalued due to regulatory, economic, or planning deficiencies.

The significance of local food products and their integration into the tourism experience has been a focal point of research across many studies that have highlighted the diverse array of local food products and their cultural importance (Karaca et al., 2015). However, the literature also points to a disconnect between local food producers and the tourism industry, suggesting a need for improved

communication and collaboration to fully leverage local gastronomy for tourism development (Serdar, 2018; Nebioğlu, 2017).

The conceptualisation of gastronomic tourism has evolved over the years and researchers have offered varied definitions of the term. Long (2004) and Wolf (2006) define it as an exploration of culture through food and others like Smith and Costello (2009) emphasise its role in creating unique visitor attractions. The economic impact of gastronomic tourism is also significant to consider, with Quan and Wang (2004) noting that a substantial portion of tourist expenditure is allocated to food. This underscores the importance of local cuisine in delivering a quality holiday experience and differentiating destinations. Thus, gastronomic tourism is not only a means of satisfying the biological need to eat but also serves as a tool for tourism promotion, creating a sense of place through regional identity (Hall & Gossling, 2016). It can add value to core tourism products, become the focus for special events, or stand as a niche attraction in its own right. The roots of gastronomic tourism are grounded in agriculture, culture, and tourism, with each component offering unique marketing opportunities (Bessiere, 1998; Long, 2013).

Tourists often view culinary tourism as an opportunity to break away from their daily routines and eating patterns, seeking out novel culinary experiences that can enhance their social standing among family and friends. This aligns with Schultze's (2013) observation that an increasing number of travellers are pursuing genuine experiences in both travel and dining. This trend has been further encouraged by media representations favourably shaping tourist perceptions of the connection between tourism and gastronomy. The categorisation of gastronomic tourism into gourmet, culinary, and rural/urban tourism reflects varying tourist interests and engagements with food-related activities (Hall & Sharples, 2003). This differentiation is crucial for understanding the diverse motivations and experiences of tourists in relation to food.

Gastronomic tourism represents a symbiotic relationship between food and tourism, where the former plays a critical role in enhancing the latter. The literature suggests that while food may not be the primary reason for travel, it is an integral part of the destination experience, offering opportunities for cultural engagement and economic development.

Gastronomy in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's vast geography encompasses a variety of regions, each with its distinct cultural characteristics. Culinary practices reflect this diversity and while there are widely recognized dishes nationwide, like kabsa, each province has its unique dishes. A hallmark of Saudi Arabian cuisine is the prevalent use of aromatic spices and herbs in main courses, as well as honey and dates in desserts, with Arabic coffee serving as a traditional welcome gesture. Certain dishes are common across various provinces and may even extend into the culinary traditions of adjacent regions and nations.

The geographic location of Saudi Arabia as a land that connects the east with the west, and its longstanding trade ties with neighbouring nations has produced rich cuisines and culinary heritages. As a result, the shared culinary practices of Saudi Arabia are not confined by the geographical boundaries of its provinces; they spill over, creating a gastronomic mosaic that is both distinct and interconnected with the broader Middle Eastern cuisine. This culinary interweaving is a testament to the fluid exchange of culture and tradition among neighbouring regions and nations. Dishes that are commonplace in Saudi Arabian dining tables often find their counterparts in the kitchens of nearby countries, illustrating a rich tapestry of shared heritage and mutual gastronomic influences.

This cross-regional culinary dialogue goes beyond food; it is a reflection of the historical caravan routes that once traversed these lands, the spice trade that brought not only goods but also novel culinary ideas to the region, and the age-old traditions of hospitality that are ingrained in the local culture. The commonality of certain dishes across various provinces—and indeed across borders—is a celebration of this shared history and a nod to the interconnectedness of the Arabian people.

Table 1: Examples of Popular Cuisines Across Saudi Arabia

Cuisine	Category	Commonality
Kleija	Pastry	Al-Qaseem Province
Areeka	Breakfast	Aseer Province
Mashghotha	Winter Cuisine	Aseer Province
Matazeez	Main Course	Central Provinces
Marsa	Appetizer	Jazan Province
Magash	Main Course	Jazan Province
Makshan Samak	Main Course	Jazan Province
Mufalat	Dessert	Jazan Province
Mahshoosh	Side Dish	Jazan Province
Maftoot	Main Course	Jazan Province
Haisya	Main Course	Jazan Province
Kabsa	Main Course	Nationwide
Mofattah	Guest Cuisine	Nationwide
Magalgal	Breakfast	Nationwide
Kabda	Breakfast	Nationwide
Hunaini	Winter Cuisine	Nationwide
Haneeth	Main Course	Nationwide
Hamees	Side Dish	Nationwide
Mansaf	Main Course	Northern Provinces
Tashreeba	Main Course	Northern Provinces
Bakeela	Winter Cuisine	Northern Provinces
Saleeg	Main Course	Western Provinces
Mutabbag	Side Dish	Western Provinces
Jareesh	Side Dish	Western, Central, Northern and Eastern Provinces
Thareed/Garsan	Main Course	Western, Central, Northern and Eastern Provinces

In addition to this list of popular dishes, southern provinces are also popular for their breadmaking. For example, Aseer and Jazan share similarities in terms of breads they make, especially using traditional ovens (mifa). However, there are differences in the recipes and ingredients used to make the different types of traditional breads. Other provinces, especially where dates are grown, are famous for their dates-based pastries, especially Algaseem and Alahsaa.

Gastronomic Identity

Gastronomic identity is increasingly acknowledged as a key factor in enhancing tourist satisfaction and fostering their desire to revisit a destination. This identity transcends mere sustenance, embodying the culinary methods, heritage, and innovations that are deeply embedded in the local culture and environment, reflecting the history, geography, and societal fabric of the destination. Danhi (2003) underscores six fundamental elements that craft a place's distinctive culinary identity: its natural surroundings, historical narrative, cultural diversity, dining traditions, predominant flavours, and heritage recipes. A place's unique culinary experiences can profoundly enrich the travel experience, swaying tourists' decisions to return.

Individuals often gravitate towards the foods they were raised on—a concept deeply rooted in cultural norms that sociologists and anthropologists have studied extensively over the years. These studies have characterised eating habits as behaviours that not only form the foundation of societal rituals, but also symbolise the broader workings of a society, suggesting that taste preferences are shaped and constrained by cultural and social factors (Atkins & Bowler, 2016).

Culinary tourism, driven by the allure of local gastronomy, is a testament to the influence of these cultural and historical factors. As tourists journey from one locale to another, they not only experience new and exotic flavours but also contribute to the evolution of local cuisine, leading to a dynamic fusion of culinary practices that also shape the gastronomic identity of the destination. The interplay of trade, religion, education, and politics has historically introduced new culinary elements and practices from across the globe, further enriching this identity.

Cuisines and gastronomic traditions are born from a melting pot of ingredients and methods, a result of the intermingling of diverse cultures, ethnic influences, and historical contexts, all within the confines of available resources and culinary knowledge. Technology's pervasive influence is also reshaping culinary tourism, with customers now having immediate access to global trends, thereby influencing their dining preferences and pushing the food industry towards innovation and adaptability. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs are leveraging technology to create distinctive and competitive business models.

By understanding the elements that shape a place's gastronomic identity and the broader cultural influences on gastronomy, stakeholders in the tourism industry can better cater to the tastes of visitors and create memorable experiences that encourage repeat visits.

Gastronomic Identity in Saudi Arabia

The diverse cuisine of Saudi Arabia creates opportunities to build destination identity around local gastronomic products. Saudi Arabia boasts unique local and national dishes that are recognized and appreciated by both residents and visitors. These dishes are an integral part of the Saudi identity and are increasingly sought after by tourists seeking authentic travel experiences. (Gulisova, 2022). However, most destinations in Saudi Arabia today rely on fast food chains and non-cultural food providers to meet the demand of tourists. Each destination in the country can provide unique and memorable experiences for tourists if they build their identity around local food.

As tourists today seek authentic experiences that reflect local identity and heritage, Saudi Arabia's gastronomy offers a window into the nation's culture, history, and people. The gastronomic experience can significantly enhance Saudi Arabia's appeal as a tourist destination, providing a unique competitive edge by enriching the destination's image. Gastronomy establishes a positive link between food and local/national characteristics, serving as either a primary or secondary motivator for travel (Jara-Amézaga, 2023; Maspul, 2023). The literature demonstrates that Saudi Arabia possesses a distinctive gastronomic image, with its cuisine reflecting a blend of traditional Middle Eastern flavours and modern culinary trends. However, despite this image, tourists find it difficult to experience local cuisines in authentic restaurant cultural settings.

In the southern provinces of Aseer and Jazan, the similarities between the local Saudi cuisine and neighbouring Yemeni cuisine poses a problem for marketers and policy makers, as the Yemeni restaurants established in the southern provinces tend to promote their dishes as local and traditional ones. Another issue is the varying flavours these restaurants provide, influencing the image of local cuisines. Similar issues occur in other provinces where non-cultural restaurants serve cultural food in unauthentic settings. However, despite such challenges, recent years have seen an increase in local restaurants that serve authentic cuisines, positively contributing to the destination's identity. Moreover, promoting local cuisine and developing gastronomic tourism can provide a competitive advantage to the country, serving as a key element in branding and differentiating Saudi Arabia as a unique and culturally rich destination (Gulisova, 2022).

To further enhance its gastronomic appeal, Saudi Arabia could focus on identifying and promoting its culinary specialties, thereby developing a distinct gastronomic identity that can be leveraged to promote the nation itself. Collaborative efforts to

build a cohesive gastronomic tourism experience can complement the existing regional tourism products, creating new tourism brands, gastronomic routes, and attractive tourism campaigns that highlight the rich and diverse culinary heritage of Saudi Arabia (Haressy, 2018).

Gastronomic Identity and Agritourism

In recent years, policymakers have increased their focus on agritourism as a potential driver for development in rural areas. As agritourism relies on farms, agriculture and its crops and products, the relationship between gastronomic identity and agritourism is strong. Farms that operate in tourism normally include kitchens where local traditional cuisines are served to visitors. Nevertheless, the opportunities can go beyond kitchen-made cuisines.

Each part of Saudi Arabia is known for growing certain crops, for example Al Qassim for dates; Al Ahsa for dates, red rice, and lime; Jazan for mangoes and tropical fruits; Taif for grapes and pomegranates; and Al Jouf for olives. These crops can be elevated through processing techniques to generate multiple products that contribute to the region's gastronomic identity. For example, pickles, hotel welcome drinks, gifting food jars, and other products. Building the destination's identity around local crops and cuisines enhances tourists' experiences.

Hotels are among the most important tourism services, and most tourists visiting Saudi Arabia stay in hotels and serviced apartments. These hotels must start including local cuisines and crops in their menus and treats for their guests. For example, most hotels serve coffee and dates as welcome treats for their guests. Linking such practices to local products like mango juice in Jazan, and pomegranate juice in Taif can further enhance tourists' experiences and satisfaction.

Conclusion

The allure of Saudi Arabia's gastronomic heritage is a testament to the country's rich tapestry of flavours and culinary traditions. It is a narrative woven through the spices that perfume the air, the vibrant markets that dazzle the senses, and the age-old recipes passed down through generations. This heritage extends beyond what is found on a plate; it is about the stories and connections that each dish represents, the cultural identity that simmers in every pot, and the shared experiences that are savoured with every bite.

As we delve deeper into the essence of Saudi Arabia's gastronomic scene, we uncover an untapped potential that is waiting to be explored. The Kingdom's diverse palette of dishes—from the hearty kabsa to the delicate flavours of Aseer's breads—is more than a mere attraction; it is a cultural ambassador waiting in the wings. The current landscape, dominated by international fast-food chains, often overshadows

the authentic culinary experiences that could otherwise define a traveller's journey. The challenge lies in bridging the gap between the rich, yet underrepresented local food culture and the expectations of tourists seeking genuine encounters with Saudi heritage.

The literature points to a burgeoning interest in gastronomic tourism, yet it also highlights a gap in scholarly attention within the Arabian Gulf. Researchers and policymakers alike are encouraged to explore and elevate the role of food as a central pillar of cultural exchange and tourism in future studies.

To truly harness the power of gastronomy in tourism, Saudi Arabia must craft a narrative that celebrates its culinary diversity while ensuring that authentic experiences are accessible to travellers. This could mean reimagining the gastronomic identity to be as visible and inviting as the nation's historical landmarks. It is about creating a symphony of tastes that resonate with the stories of the land, engaging tourists in a multisensory journey that extends from the bustling souks to the tranquil oases.

In the southern provinces, where the lines between Saudi and Yemeni cuisines blur, there lies an opportunity to distinguish and honour the unique flavours of each region. This isn't just about marketing; it's about honouring the authenticity of the nation's gastronomic story. It's about ensuring that when a dish is presented to a traveller, it is not just a meal but an invitation to partake in the region's history, celebrations, and daily rhythms.

The integration of gastronomy with agritourism presents fertile ground for innovation. Tourists can go beyond tasting local cuisines to participating in the creation of dishes that use local produce, understanding the journey from farm to table, and in the process, forging a deeper connection with the land and its people. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's gastronomic identity has the potential to be a cornerstone of its tourism industry. It remains a question of crafting experiences that are as memorable as they are delicious and transforming dining from a passive activity to an active exploration of culture. By weaving the nation's culinary heritage into the fabric of tourism, Saudi Arabia can offer a feast for the senses that leaves travellers yearning for more, long after their journey has ended.



The Role of Gastronomic Tourism in Tourist Destinations

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Introduction

The act of consuming food, which is a fundamental and physiological requirement in contemporary society, has given rise to a sector that is increasingly associated with the tourism industry—the food and beverage sector. This sector is now perceived as a type of recreational activity and is sought after as an experience to be enjoyed outside of one’s usual surroundings. Therefore, the significance of food within the tourism sector has experienced notable growth, and the connection between food and tourism has become a prominent area of scholarly inquiry.

While the primary purpose of travel may not revolve around food, it is common for visitors to partake in culinary experiences during their journeys to other destinations. The majority of tourists, regardless of the presence or absence of food and beverage services at their lodgings, exhibit a preference for dining at external establishments. This inclination stems from a desire to familiarise themselves with and sample the indigenous cuisine specific to the locale. Gastronomic tourists are individuals who engage in premeditated visits to restaurants and food stores as part of their travel itinerary, where food is often the primary motivation for their choice of destination. Therefore, it may be inferred that a significant proportion of individuals who travel internationally are primarily motivated by their interest in gastronomy. This chapter demonstrates the significance of this particular type of tourism and its potential economic implications for various destinations. This chapter reviews previous studies on the role of gastronomic tourism in tourist destinations. It also provides insights on how gastronomy and food tourism have become a tool to attract tourists to various destinations.

What is Gastronomy Tourism?

Food has become a contributor to economic and social development through engaging local individuals in agricultural activities and producing sustenance for the populace. Also, it is of great importance in the development and progress of a region and can be strategically leveraged for economic objectives (Henderson, 2009). The integration of food with tourism has emerged as an integral component of tourist destination offerings, exerting a significant influence on the attraction of travellers.

In recent years, gastronomy tourism has emerged as a prominent and fast-expanding facet of tourism destinations, contributing significantly to their overall appeal. Countries are currently prioritising the development of marketing prospects in the field of culinary tourism and the relationship between food and tourism has garnered increasing attention from scholars (Chi et al., 2010). Food tourism and gastronomic tourism were defined by Hall and Mitchell (2001) as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel” (p. 308).

The fundamental driving force behind travel for gastronomy is the desire to visit a destination that offers food products, food events, and restaurants to taste and experience the unique features of regions specialised in food production. Although the primary objective of travel may not be centred on gastronomy, it is crucial for travellers to engage in culinary encounters when exploring different locales. According to Long (2004), culinary tourism can be characterised as a means of immersing oneself in different cultures through gastronomy. Gastronomic tourism revolves around the engagement in food-related pursuits, including visits to food producers, participation in food festivals, patronage of eating establishments, and indulgence in culinary innovations crafted by acclaimed chefs. The aforementioned sector has experienced substantial growth and widespread recognition in recent years. This specific type of tourism is characterised by visitors’ active involvement with food and its related products throughout their travel experience.

Gastronomic tourism encompasses a range of activities that go beyond the mere consumption of food. Alongside the inclusion of authentic, traditional, and innovative culinary experiences, this form of travel may also entail engaging in interconnected ancillary pursuits, such as visiting local food producers. The growing preference among travellers to explore the cultural dimensions of different locations has raised the importance of local cuisine in enhancing the experience for tourists seeking to obtain a deeper understanding of a destination’s culture through its culinary traditions. According to Gheorghie, Tudorache, and Nistoreanu (2014), gastronomic tourism encompasses various subcategories including items such as cheese, fish, fruit, truffles, and beverages like tea. Culinary routes are well recognized as attractive activities within culinary tourism. As an authentic system, this entity comprises a multifaceted thematic tourist offering.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) notes that gastronomy goes beyond sustenance to include the culture, heritage, customs, and communal bonds that are formed through and around food (para. 1). Cultural exchange serves as a means to foster cross-cultural understanding and facilitate greater proximity between individuals and their own traditions. The field of gastronomy tourism is widely acknowledged for its substantial contribution to the conservation of cultural heritage. It is especially vital for creating a range of economic prospects, especially in rural regions. One of the initiatives that the UNWTO embraced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is aimed at revitalising the tourist sector and fostering a sense of optimism within the industry.

The UNWTO has identified and emphasised several culinary traditions that are representative of different continents. For instance, African cuisine encompasses a comprehensive exploration of many flavours and spices from Algeria to Zambia and from Cote d'Ivoire to Uganda. Gastronomy tourism has the potential to stimulate economic development and employment opportunities in various regions of Africa, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, it can contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. American cuisine, specifically Latin American and Caribbean fare, presents a unique blend of invigorating bites and traditional slow-cooked dishes. Asian cuisine, originating from the largest continent globally, presents a diverse array of delicacies catering to various palates, blending sweetness, sourness, and spiciness. Gastronomy tourism possesses a distinctive capacity to foster the development of sustainable tourism in the regions of Asia and the Pacific as well.

The culinary traditions of Europe, ranging from renowned Mediterranean dishes to the cuisine of Eastern Europe, exemplify a fusion of historical and contemporary elements, as well as a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation. The European culinary landscape has emerged as a prominent factor in enticing tourists and gastronomy tourism has played a pivotal role in enabling destinations to broaden their economic sectors and stimulate rural development. Similarly, Middle Eastern cuisine, spanning from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, encompasses a myriad of flavours and textures that reflect a mosaic of cultural identities. The convergence of gastronomy and tourism offers a valuable opportunity to save both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, strengthen local communities, and foster intercultural appreciation.

Gastronomic tourism may include observing the cooking process of a particular dish (Hall et al., 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, it involves travellers seeking out local foods and beverages as part of their travel experiences, rather than relying solely on the culinary offerings provided by restaurants and hotels (Akgol, 2012 as cited in Sormaz et al., 2016). Gastronomic tourism encompasses activities such as visiting food producers, attending food festivals, dining at restaurants, and exploring locations of significance to specific culinary traditions; thus, this form of tourism involves engaging in experiences such as sampling unique dishes, observing the production and preparation processes, and having the opportunity to enjoy a meal prepared by a renowned chef (Hall et al., 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Tourists may travel to a specific geographical area with the intention of engaging in unique cultural encounters, or to partake in the local gastronomy and appreciate the distinctive tastes that are representative of that particular locale. As a result, various factors have emerged as influential determinants in shaping tourists' destination preferences. These factors include the opportunity to experience regional cuisine and observe the different stages of production. Additionally, the appeal of savouring a local dish made from a raw material that is exclusive to a specific area has also been found to play a significant role. The Global Data report published in 2022 analyses recent gastronomy tourism market trends (Global Data UK, 2022). The report outlines the primary categories of travellers in the gastronomic tourism sector, including recreational tourists, diversionary tourists, existential tourists, and experimental tourists. The following demonstrates each category:

- **Recreational gastronomy tourists** prefer familiar culinary offerings. A typical leisure traveller often gravitates towards fast-food establishments, pre-packaged tour meals, and restaurants that offer a familiar and predictable menu, including options from their place of origin. Given that these tourists are not inclined towards food and beverage tourism, they are less inclined to engage in extensive pre-trip study to identify optimal destinations for gourmet experiences. Instead, they are more prone to making impromptu decisions when encountering restaurants or bars during their leisurely strolls.
- **Diversionary gastronomy travellers**, characterised by their preference for party venues and social activities, exhibit a much lower level of interest in the specific setting of their holiday or trip prioritising who they travel with instead. For individuals engaging in diversionary gastronomy tourism, food and beverage options must be conveniently available and easily accessible. Furthermore, a substantial quantity of food must be provided to ensure that these tourists see their experience as being of high value. Their preference lies in quantity rather than gourmet cuisine.
- **Existential gastronomy visitors** are inclined to actively pursue local and regional culinary experiences, opting to dine at establishments frequented by the local population. They have a preference for modest and traditional eateries as opposed to luxurious and upscale establishments. During the pre-trip phase, existential tourists rely on credible sources of travel information, including personal travel blogs authored by reputable individuals in the travel industry and specialised travel books and guides. Additionally, their motivation stems from educational experiences and a keen interest in attending cooking schools, participating in cooking workshops, embarking on fishing trips, and engaging in food festivals. This observation indicates that many of these visitors go on their journeys primarily driven by the intention of engaging in gastronomic pursuits.
- **Experimental gastronomy tourists** are frequently perceived as individuals with a penchant for contemporary culinary trends and a willingness to explore and adopt novel food choices, fashion styles, and cooking methodologies.

They actively pursue dining establishments that offer inventive menus and other culinary experiences that are characterised by their exclusivity. Individuals engage in travel for the purpose of personal gratification and to partake in opulent experiences characterised by refined gastronomy and exclusive offerings that necessitate the payment of a premium. Specialised experience is a prerequisite for this position

The aforementioned classifications demonstrate the impact of gastronomic tourism on various categories of travellers. Therefore, culinary tourism is of considerable importance since it fosters a sense of regional pride, attracts conscientious and knowledgeable visitors, and exerts a significant economic impact on the destination (World Food Travel Association, 2022). The scope of gourmet tourism encompasses a wide range of gastronomic experiences that go beyond the traditional offerings of food guides and restaurants. Also, food has the potential to function as a captivating tourist allure within a certain geographical area, appealing to tourists that possess a keen desire to engage in the authentic local customs and cultural encounters.

The Significance of Gastronomy in the Context of Destinations

With the growing interest in gastronomy as part of the tourist experience, it is essential to understand the significance of gastronomy in tourist destinations as part of tourist attractions. This section looks at components and definitions of tourist destinations. The UNWTO defines a tourism destination as “a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight.” (UNWTO, n.d.) Kotler et al. (1999) defined a tourism region as an area that attracts visitors from outside and the mixture of products and services in that place. This definition is meant to focus on the place with combinations of products that can be provided at the destination. Seaton and Bennett’s (1996) definition similarly focused on natural and cultural attractions. Tosun and Jenkins (1996) added that tourist destinations possess significant tourist attractions, centres of interest, and amenities such as festivals and carnivals. Such regions can serve as nationally recognized areas with a distinct image, supported by a well-developed transportation network, promising growth potential, and adequate geographical space to enhance tourist facilities. There are significant components in a tourism destination that a tourist seeks.

The UNWTO also noted that a tourist destination is a composite entity comprising both tangible and intangible components. These components encompass natural, cultural, and man-made resources, as well as attractions, facilities, services, and activities centred around a specific point of interest. They form the fundamental elements of destination marketing and contribute to the holistic visitor experience, encompassing emotional aspects that appeal to potential customers. A tourism product undergoes pricing and sales processes through various distribution channels

and follows a life cycle. Aleksanyan (2021) added that a tourism destination is regarded as a commodified entity that is bought and sold, functioning as a product whose growth and competitive edge are contingent upon accurate targeting and packaging. According to the UNWTO (2007), the destination experience comprises attractions, public and private amenities, accessibility, human resources, image and character, and price all of which impact travellers' decision making when organising their itinerary.

According to Aleksanyan (2021), a tourism destination is perceived as a commodified entity that is subject to commercial transactions, whose expansion and ability to compete rely on precise targeting and effective packaging. In a market characterised by intensifying competition, destinations actively seek distinctive features that can afford them a competitive edge (Seyitoğlu, Faruk., Ivanov, 2020). Hence, the primary focus of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) lies in the identification and promotion of tourist attractions, as well as leveraging factors that may exert an influence on tourists' decision making processes to visit a certain place like gastronomy. Safeguarding the diversity and authenticity of regional cuisines is an important focus in the field of destination development, marketing, and maintenance, which are influenced by distinct geographical, cultural, and climatic elements (Sormaz et al., 2016).

Gastronomy has been employed as a strategic tool for promoting tourist destinations through marketing efforts, and exerts a substantial influence on the quality and competitiveness of a given location. Hence, the integration of indigenous gastronomic traditions within the tourism sector assumes a crucial function in contemporary strategies for destination marketing (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). The marketing of tourist destinations is increasingly complex and characterised by fierce competition. One particular aspect that holds significant potential for the development, introduction, and promotion of a destination is the distinctiveness of its local cuisines (Sormaz et al., 2016). Sormaz et al. (2016) mentioned that these activities also play a key role in the marketing strategies implemented by destinations. According to Stalmirska (2020), urban tourist destinations are progressively integrating food into their destination marketing plans as a means to gain a competitive advantage in the current market landscape, which is marked by intensified competition. Du Rand and Heath (2006) argue that the rise of culinary tourism can be ascribed to changes in consumer preferences, heightened environmental awareness, and the desire for competitive and sustainable locations. In response to this phenomenon, there was a notable increase in various undertakings related to food, including the establishment of initiatives, networks, and marketing campaigns focused on food tourism.

When discussing gastrotourist destinations, it is important to differentiate between tourists whose primary motivation for travel is not specifically gastronomy, and those who see gastronomy as one of their main motivations for travelling (López et al., 2019). Gastronomic tourism enables individuals to discover, sample, and encounter a particular destination's culinary offerings and beverages, thereby enhancing the overall experience of local tourism (Dixit, 2021). Thus, travellers who visit a particular

place should be actively engaged with the regional culture across all facets. Morales and Cordova (2019) assert that destinations which leverage their culinary potential as a means to promote and establish their position within the tourist market contribute to the cultivation of a distinct national identity.

According to Sahin (2015), engaging in gastronomic tourism activities in a particular destination can provide both direct and indirect employment opportunities as well as financial income. Although tourists may not always travel with the primary intention of exploring gastronomy, they nonetheless partake in consuming local cuisine (Tovmasyan, 2019). From this perspective, gastronomic tourism serves to promote a tourist destination by engaging visitors with the culture and traditions of a destination. When culinary tourism is strategically encouraged and nurtured, it can enhance a destination's attractiveness and substantially contribute to its economic development. The enhancement of food heritage and quality of life within the community may also be observed (Mohamed et al., 2020; Du Rand & Heath, 2006). Furthermore, there are several gastronomy-related endeavours, such as gastronomy festivals, gastronomy exhibitions, museums, and similar projects, that are undertaken to preserve the gastronomic heritage of a specific geographical region.

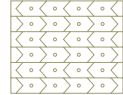
Finally, Gastronomic tourism is widely recognized as an essential and introspective component of destination development and promotion. Therefore, gastronomy tourism serves as a pathway for the development of tourist destinations, offering the potential to enhance and supplement the offerings of a destination. Additionally, culinary events, food festivals, immersive cooking vacations, gourmet excursions, and promoting indigenous food items gained significant attention and support. This, in turn, allows for the expansion of marketing opportunities and the establishment of stronger connections with other sectors of the economy, which would contribute to the destination's efforts in attracting tourists.



Authenticity Perception and Gastronomic Food Experience

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Introduction

People often engage in travel as a means to seek respite and explore locales that are deemed more genuine (Cohen, 1979). Hall (2005) posits that those who are in search of a gastronomic encounter are actively pursuing distinctive eating experiences that allow them to explore novel tastes and culinary sensations. Gastronomy focuses on the relationships between food and culture (Johns & Clarke, 2001; Johns & Kivela, 2001). The need for genuine gastronomic experiences has increased among travellers (Naoi, 2004) and as a result, destinations must provide guests with a greater array of gourmet culinary experiences focusing on accentuating the genuine and culturally significant aspects of the cuisine.

There is a relationship between gastronomic food experiences and perceptions of authenticity. Gastronomy is described as authentic when it is related to a specific region, prepared in a certain way, or using traditional methods of preparation (Dixit, 2020b). The use of gastronomy as a strategy to attract tourists and develop the local communities has the potential to effectively promote the destination. By offering an authentic gastronomic experience, the destination may leverage the appeal of culinary offerings to entice visitors and foster a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction among its locals. Offering local food experiences could create a positive image for visitors about local communities' rich culture. The effectiveness of a gastronomic meal is enhanced when guests perceive it to be real. The desire to experience the real life of local people motivates visitors to seek an authentic experience of the destination (Mak et al., 2013). The literature on gastronomic tourism indicates that the terms "traditional," "original," and "pure" are often associated with the perceived authenticity of local food (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2013). This chapter aims to highlight the importance of authenticity in gastronomic food experiences at destinations.

What is Authenticity?

Authenticity may be defined as a service or experience that has qualities of genuineness, reality, truthfulness, and originality (Abarca, 2004; Brown, 2001; Taylor, 1991). The pursuit of authenticity by individuals has had a significant influence on their consumer behaviour (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Fine (2003) notes that “the desire for authenticity now occupies a central position in contemporary culture. Whether in our search for selfhood, leisure experience, or in our material purchases, we search for the real, the genuine.” (p. 153). Authenticity may be understood as the “taste of place,” exemplifying the intricate relationship between food and its geographical origin. History, geography, and culture influence gastronomy and local food preparation and expertise (D’Amico, 2004).

There are four distinct approaches for assessing authenticity, including the objectivist, constructivist, existentialist, and postmodernist perspectives. The object-related dimensions refer to “temporal, spatial and product-specific attributes of food specialties” (Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014, p. 1696). Objective authenticity tends to use clear standards to determine “what is or is not genuine (authentic)” (Kim & Jamal, 2007, p. 183). Constructivists have posited that visitors possess the ability to assess the authenticity of their experiences by drawing upon their own perspectives and earlier encounters (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Constructivists believe that authenticity is an output of how visitors perceive or interpret experience (Wang, 1999). Postmodernists see authenticity as affect-driven. Postmodernists see authenticity as affect-driven. Therefore, individuals may accept the inauthenticity of toured objects (Wang, 1999) and perceive inauthentic objects or themed settings as authentic (Vidon et al., 2018). Lastly, existential authenticity refers to “a state of being, rather than an essentialist, objective quality” (p. 4). Existential authenticity is achieved when individuals feel more like themselves and when they are free from their inauthentic lives (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

Food Authenticity

Individuals who are in search of an authentic gastronomic experience are motivated to build a deep connection with a certain destination through food. (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Kovács et al., 2014). Food authenticity can impact customers’ gastronomic purchasing decisions. Culinary tourists’ curiosity can only be satisfied by consuming authentic food; hence, it is important to provide them with such experiences. Food experiences may strengthen food heritage, regional gastronomies, and special local foodways, which positively increase local people’ pride and visitors’ perception of authenticity (Kim et al., 2019). Social interactions and food authenticity are important facets of food experiences (Atsız et al., 2021) and the latter impacts tourists’ satisfaction (Ramkisson and Uysal, 2011; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003).

Visitors perceive food as authentic when it is made by locals using traditional methods. An authentic food experience is a cultural phenomenon in which visitors

perceive chefs, restaurants, recipes, and dishes as representations of the local culture and spirit (Sims, 2009; Baldacchino, 2015). Visitors increasingly demand unique gastronomic experiences and authentic food products (Chousou and Mattas, 2021; Riefler, 2020). Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2014), believing that original, local, and authentic food culture positively enhances their gastronomic food experiences.

Why Authenticity is Important in Gastronomic Food Experience?

Learning about other cultures requires gaining information and knowledge about their gastronomy. In order to fully immerse themselves in a genuine gastronomic experience, visitors must engage in more than just the act of consuming food. This entails actively engaging with local people, such as waiters and chefs, to get insights into the culinary culture. Additionally, visitors can seek to acquire knowledge about the historical context of the food they encounter, participate in shopping activities, go on food tours, attend food festivals, and partake in cooking courses. These elements contribute to a comprehensive and enriching gastronomic experience (Sims, 2009; Timothy and Ron, 2013). Visitors may use many indications to assess the authenticity of their gourmet meal experience. Cohen and Avieli (2004) indicated that visitors use ingredients, dishes' presentation, and cooking methods to evaluate authenticity.

Tourists have a strong desire for distinctive culinary encounters and genuine food items (Chousou and Mattas, 2021; Riefler, 2020). Gastronomic experience designers should focus on creating authentic encounters by paying attention to the environment and the information visitors receive about the dishes, whether on the menu or elsewhere (Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011).

Authenticity and Quality

This section elucidates the correlation between gastronomy, authenticity, and quality. Engaging in an authentic culinary encounter and perceiving the meal as genuine is expected to enhance individuals' perception of quality. Visitors believe local food to be authentic and of good quality and such perceptions are rooted in the geographical connections between local cuisine and place of origin (Guzel and Apaydin, 2016). Visitors are more likely to use authenticity as a means to assess the quality of a place and the food it offers (Kovács et al., 2014; Liao & Ma, 2009; Sims, 2009). The characteristics that define a region and are associated with the quality and authenticity of cuisine include the origin of the product, the presence of local skills and history, the knowledge and expertise of the local community, the level of production, and the use of raw resources (Pike, 2015). Visitors are more likely to rely on three types of quality attributes to assess gastronomic experience. Functional

(e.g., food quality), human (e.g., service quality), and mechanical (e.g., physical environment) (Bujisic et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2021). Additionally, gastronomic food experiences may influence visitors' quality of life since an elevated or sought after experience may raise one's social status.

When destinations design and offer authentic and high-quality gastronomic experiences that meet visitors' expectations and needs, they are more likely to create a positive destination image (Seo et al., 2017). The authenticity of a gourmet food experience is the result of several contributing factors, including the quality of ingredients, the authenticity of physical goods, the delivery procedure and quality of service, and the location in which the gastronomic food experience takes place (Cherro Osorio et al., 2022; Ellis et al., 2018).

Authenticity as a Sustainable Strategy

Authenticity is a crucial baseline in developing and sustaining visitors' food experiences. According to Rinaldi (2017), gourmet tourism has a significant role in fostering sustainable local development. The provision of genuine gastronomic experiences indirectly contributes to the enhancement of community services and facilities through the tax revenue generated from visitors (Zimmerhackel et al., 2019). Additionally, it stimulates other economic sectors such as handicrafts, agriculture, and fishing (Zhang et al., 2021), thereby emphasising the significance of preserving natural, archaeological, and historical sites within local communities (Khalid et al., 2019). Authentic gastronomy can also contribute to the development of rural tourism and boost the agricultural economy (Povey et al., 2011). According to Sims (2009) "by telling the 'story' of food production, it is possible to use the tourist's desire for authenticity to encourage the development of products and services that will boost sustainability and benefit rural regions for visitors and residents alike" (p. 322).

The incorporation of authentic local cuisine in tourism development may positively and significantly elevate the socioeconomic status of local communities in several ways. Initially, an increase in the consumption of local foods by tourists, which they see as being genuine, would have a positive impact on the local economy. The need for locally sourced food will result in an increased demand for raw materials and ingredients that are cultivated or produced by individuals within the local community. This development has the potential to provide more employment prospects for those residing in the area (Richards, 2012). Second, the demand for local food might decrease the carbon footprint and pollution by minimising negative environmental effects associated with transportation and imports, which will have a positive impact on the environment (Boniface, 2017; Sims, 2009). Third, this development in local food has the potential to provide more employment prospects for local people (Richard 2012). Fourth, the thriving of authentic food experiences have the potential to enhance the local community's understanding and awareness of sustainable practices. Fifth, providing the authentic experience that visitors want would make

them satisfied, and there is a positive relationship between satisfaction and intention to revisit, so this enhances the profitability and sustainability of local communities.

Outcomes of Authentic Gastronomic Food Experiences

Food experiences contribute to a sense of place authenticity (Spielmann et al., 2018). In gastronomic attractions, the local food's presentation and authenticity is one of the dominant attributes that influence visitors' quality perceptions (Sims, 2009). Gastronomy tourism offers tourists the opportunity to experience pleasure, excitement, and entertainment, while also facilitating their exploration and comprehension of the distinctions between their own culture and the culture of the area they are visiting (Antón et al., 2019). There is a higher likelihood of creating lasting memories when food authenticity and culturally relevant activities are included in a particular location (Atsız et al., 2021). Studies have indicated that locality and authenticity are important factors that shape destination image (Chang & Mak, 2018; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2014). Restaurants that provide a genuine gourmet cuisine experience possess a heightened appeal to tourists and have the potential to create more revenue in comparison to other dining establishments. Gupta et al., (2022) found that gastronomy influences visitors' willingness to pay a price premium for authentic food.

Gastronomy gives visitors the opportunity to learn about the destinations' culture and historical heritage through tasting and experiencing (Ellis et al., 2018). Authentic gastronomic experiences are expected to be cultural, encouraging learning about local traditions; sensory, leveraging one's senses of taste, touch, and smell; exciting, allowing visitors to escape their daily life and routine; and health-focused, helping visitors increase their wellbeing (Kim & Eves, 2012). The connections between food and culture enhance the importance of gastronomy in marketing a destination through communicating a distinctive cultural identity and offering unique local food (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Sims, 2009). Muskat et al., (2019) found that authenticity is a stronger predictor of visitors' satisfaction.

Food Authenticity in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia consists of 13 provinces, each characterised by its own culinary traditions that have been transmitted throughout successive generations. The culinary traditions of a region are often influenced by the historical context of the area, with each meal serving as a reflection of this connection. Moreover, the local cuisine is often shaped by the availability and use of certain resources within the vicinity. Traditional Saudi cuisine is widely regarded by local residents as genuine, mostly owing to its adherence to traditional cooking techniques and the use of customary ingredients. Within every geographical area of the country, a plethora of traditional and genuine culinary offerings exist, each intrinsically linked to its own

locale. Consequently, when individuals journey to any place within the country, they exhibit an enthusiasm to partake in these regional delicacies. The Saudi Arabian people are hospitable, and their indigenous cuisine is a means to gain insight into their cultural heritage. Throughout the nation, there is a proliferation of restaurants that provide local traditional cuisine, affording guests the opportunity to indulge in distinctive and authentic gourmet experiences.

The Saudi cuisine has not been fully discovered by visitors; therefore, designing experiences with information about the culture and ingredients used would help visitors to perceive the food as authentic. There are many examples of traditional authentic Saudi food that could potentially play a role in guest experiences. Below are some examples:

Haneeth is a dish that uses fresh meat and traditional cooking techniques to get a delectably crispy and well-cooked crust. Saudi Arabia has effectively preserved traditional ways of food preparation that date back to ancient times. Haneeth is prepared by using a subterranean cooking method involving the excavation of a deep hole in the ground, which is used to cook the meat and helps retain and distribute heat effectively. The dish also includes the leaves of a native plant known as “marakh” (cork swallow-wort), and the cooking technique and spices used give the meat a smoky flavour. Actively preparing or observing preparations of haneeth can offer tourists an unparalleled opportunity to partake in a genuine and immersive gourmet experience.

Another traditional regional dish is known as Jareesh, composed of ground wheat, rice, sautéed vegetables, and chicken or meat. The production of Jareesh has the potential to provide an authentic culinary experience. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has traditional sweet dishes and confections that have been handed down from one generation to the next. One example is Hinaini, a sweet crafted with brown bread, dates, and butter, and garnished with saffron and cardamom. The consumption of local, genuine cuisine in Saudi Arabia has the potential to provide guests indelible gourmet experiences throughout their stay.

Lastly, the Saudi cuisine isn't fully discovered by the world; therefore, more effort is needed to increase the awareness and marketing of the Saudi local cuisine. The country will host major events during the next 10 years, and this is a great opportunity to market the Saudi cuisine and its authenticity, which would economically and socially influence the local communities. One factor that might help in the short term is to design food experiences for visitors that contain information about the culture, ingredients, and methods of cooking. Also, the local food festivals can be a good tool to market the authentic local food of Saudi Arabia. Lastly, the promotional campaigns for tourism in the country should focus on the local food and its authenticity.

10 Gastronomy Tourism: Innovation, Technology and Evolution

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Introduction

Gastronomic tourism comprises food-related activities, products, and experiences while travelling (Dixit, 2019). It involves a process of learning about the culinary customs of different regions, including eating, drinking, and food presentation techniques. The term goes beyond local tourism practices to encompass the cultural essence of a specific area.

This chapter extends the concept of gastronomy tourism by shedding light on the historical perspective of culinary tourism; the evolution of gastronomy tourism; the evolution of Middle Eastern cuisine; the impact of technology innovation on gastronomy tourism; and the technological advancements related to the field.

Historical Perspectives on Culinary Tourism

Culinary tourism traces its roots back to ancient civilizations and the influence of tourism and hospitality on different cultures has evolved with foods, dishes and the art of presenting them (Nistoreanu et al, 2018). Gastronomy tourism stretches across a diverse historical context, encompassing the discovery of native culinary traditions and ingredients during travel. Early manifestations of gastronomy tourism include the following:

- “*Early Culinary Tourism*” referred to culinary offerings given to pilgrims and travellers visiting popular settlements in ancient times (Heine, 2018). The city-states of Rome were famous for their wine and Athens was known for its olive oil production and banquet culture.
- “*Culinary Exchange through Silk Road*” comprised interchanges of culinary traditions, cooking techniques, and spices. This historical trading route left an indelible mark on numerous cuisines, blending various flavour profiles (Henderson, 2009).
- “*Culinary Exploration*” is a practice that gained popularity in the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly during the “Grand Tour” when European aristocracy travelled to culturally rich destinations (Nistoreanu et al, 2018). Culinary experiences played a significant role in explorers seeking unique cuisines and spices in regions like the Middle East and India.
- “*Wine Regions*” and “*Culinary Tour*”s experienced significant popularity in locations such as Tuscany (Italy), Bordeaux (France), and Napa Valley (California) (Scarpato & Daniele, 2004). These tours facilitated the active participation of visitors in local culinary heritage, and the availability of gastronomic experiences raised the number of tourists during the 20th century.
- “*Culinary Festivals*” and “*Culinary Pilgrimages*” involve the preparation and sharing of special dishes that hold cultural or traditional significance (Heine, 2018). Several examples include Spanish tapas festivals, Italian truffle festivals, and Indian street food festivals, where both locals and tourists with an interest in exploring the culinary traditions of a particular place have participated
- “*Spiritual and Culinary Journeys*” have historically incorporated components of spiritual devotion and gastronomic experiences. Muslims, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, and Christian pilgrims actively participate in the facilitation of a communal kitchen, which serves meals to visitors from diverse backgrounds (Heine, 2018).

The Evolution of Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a major and active sector within the tourism industry Nistoreanu et al. (2018) identified the evolution of gastronomy tourism, from its emergence to the various historical phases it underwent.

- **Emergence of Culinary Tourism:** The pursuit of rare and distinctive food items and spices by ancient merchants and travellers played a pivotal role in establishing the groundwork for subsequent explorations in the field of culinary arts.
- **Post-World War II.** This time period witnessed an increase in gastronomic tourism, which had begun with regional food influences that shaped individuals' travel choices.
- **Rise of Food and Travel Blogging.** Food and travel blogs gained importance with the advent of the digital era. Bloggers and influencers guided a global audience on the restaurants to eat at and culinary delights to sample. Online pages like Instagram and Pinterest have become increasingly popular, allowing tourists to visually showcase and exchange culinary encounters (Scarpato & Daniele, 2004).
- **Cooking Shows and Celebrity Chefs.** The rise in popularity of cooking shows and chef personalities such as Anthony Bourdain and Gordon Ramsay further expanded the gastronomy tourism sector. These chefs engaged in global gastronomic customs, sharing stories and dishes from around the world to large and diverse audiences.
- **Globalisation.** This phenomenon played a significant role in the exchange of culinary concepts, ingredients, and practices among many regions and cultures. The blending of diverse culinary traditions has produced an array of gastronomic practices across cosmopolitan communities.
- **Diverse Culinary Experiences.** A growing number of tourists are seeking culinary experiences, like visits to indigenous markets, enjoying street cuisine, and frequenting high-end gourmet facilities. Hjalager & Richards (2003) noted that tourists hold high regard for the authenticity of locally sourced ingredients and the use of traditional cooking techniques. This practice strengthened the farm-to-table movement. Numerous destinations offer tailored gastronomic tours in which farm tours, cooking courses, and wine sampling are examples of excursions that provide travellers with a thorough understanding of the local culinary culture.
- **Sustainable and Responsible Gastronomy Tourism** This practice encompasses various initiatives such as endorsing local and small-scale food producers, as well as lobbying for sustainable farming and fisheries. Food festivals and events have experienced a surge in popularity as a strategy for boosting tourism and celebrating the culinary heritage and customs of a particular place.

Evolution of Middle Eastern Cuisine

Heine (2018) identified the phases in the evolution of Middle Eastern cuisine as follows:

- **Historical Roots & Arab and Islamic Influences:** The culinary practices of the Middle East have experienced substantial changes throughout history as a result of various civilisational influences, including the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans (Heine, 2018). The diverse range of influences led to the incorporation of a wide array of cuisines, tastes, and culinary methods into Middle Eastern cuisine. The culinary practices of the Middle East underwent substantial advances during the period of Arab and Islamic conquests, where the introduction of spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, and cloves exerted a significant influence.
- **Ottoman Empire:** The culinary traditions of the Middle East were heavily impacted by the Ottoman Empire, seen through the introduction of notable dishes such as kebabs, baklava, and Turkish delight. Furthermore, alongside the use of sumac, saffron, and various other aromatics, this historical period gave rise to intricate and complex flavours.
- **Colonialism and Global Trade:** The colonial era brought about new culinary styles to the Middle East (Henderson, 2009) and the establishment of trade routes from Europe to Asia introduced potatoes, tomatoes, and chilli peppers into the region and its heterogeneous cuisines.
- **Modernization and Urbanization:** As Middle Eastern countries experienced urbanisation and modernization, traditional culinary traditions were gradually replaced by industrialised procedures. Preventive measures were later implemented with regards to the production, storage, and distribution of food.
- **Revival of Traditional Cuisine:** Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable increase in the recognition and popularity of traditional Middle Eastern food. There is an increasing trend among culinary experts and fans to revert back to traditional methods and recipes, as they acknowledge the significance of preserving culinary history.

Impact of Technology & Innovation

Technological advancements have changed gastronomic tourism over time and catalysed advancements in traditional cuisines and cooking practices. This section maps out the shift from traditional to digital culinary techniques.

- **Online Recipes and Cooking Resources** have enhanced the availability and accessibility of Middle Eastern recipes and culinary skills to a global audience. The prevalence of video demonstrations and detailed instructions on culinary applications, online platforms, and YouTube channels facilitated the preparation of well-known Middle Eastern dishes at home.

- **Food Delivery Applications** and services have made Middle Eastern cuisine available for purchase through local restaurants. The widespread use of this service has greatly increased the accessibility of Middle Eastern cuisine, allowing individuals to enjoy it conveniently within their own homes.
- **Restaurant Management Software** is commonly used in Middle Eastern restaurants to effectively manage and monitor client relationships, inventory management, and reservation processes, enhancing the overall gastronomic experience as a result.
- **Food Safety and Quality Assurance** in the Middle East uses technology to evaluate the quality and safety of food products. Methods for maintaining high standards in food preparation include applications for food safety, temperature sensors, and food traceability systems.
- **Sustainability and Sourcing Technology** among food manufacturers and restaurants in the Middle East encompass initiatives such as ingredient tracking, the endorsement of locally sourced and organic products, and the utilisation of data analytics and efficient inventory management techniques to mitigate food waste.
- **Social Media and Culinary Tourism** platforms play a vital role in the marketing and dissemination of Middle Eastern cuisine. Food influencers, bloggers, and chefs employ these digital channels to distribute their gourmet experiences in the Middle East, thus captivating culinary enthusiasts who are fascinated by the region's exceptional cuisine.
- **The role of innovation in gastronomy tourism** encompasses a wide range of shifts in traditional gastronomic culinary methodologies and promotional activities (Hall & Stefan, 2013). Technology has significantly transformed how individuals participate in tourism. Today, tourists can use various digital platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and websites to engage in activities such as researching, preserving, and sharing their gastronomic encounters (Park et al, 2019). The influence of online assessments and recommendations on tourists' decision-making processes has also experienced significant growth.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)** are emerging technologies for immersive and interactive experiences, blending the digital and physical worlds. VR creates a simulated environment that users can interact with, while AR overlays digital content over the real world (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). VR and AR technologies provide users with immersive experiences, allowing them to virtually explore culinary festivals, marketplaces, and restaurants before physically visiting these destinations and this advancement improves the process of pre-trip planning.
- **Culinary Tourism Applications** facilitate the creation of well-designed itineraries for travellers, including essential dining establishments, food markets, and gastronomic events. To enhance the culinary experience, these applications frequently integrate GPS navigation, assessments, and ratings.
- **Smart Kitchens and Cooking Classes** with specific culinary tourism

experiences now provide visitors the chance to acquire cooking skills and engage in the preparation of local dishes (Parasecoli & de Abreu e Lima, 2012). The classes make use of advanced laboratories that are equipped with state-of-the-art culinary technologies.

Culinary Innovation in the Travel Industry

The travel industry has successfully responded to changing consumer preferences by embracing culinary innovation and Hall & Stefan (2013) highlighted key factors that characterise this process:

- **Hotel and Accommodation Culinary Experiences** have modified their culinary offerings to give guests an authentic experience of regional cuisine (Park et al, 2019). This involves offering traditional breakfast dishes, local delicacies, and culinary education.
 - **Culinary-Themed Cruises** provide passengers the chance to engage in shore excursions that include trips to local markets, participation in cooking seminars, and the enjoyment of gourmet cuisine.
 - **Gourmet Festivals** that celebrate the customs and culture of regional cuisines are on the rise. These events commonly feature international chefs, culinary competitions, and the opportunity to sample various types of food.
 - **Airline Dining Innovations** are constantly looking to improve the quality of the in-flight meal experiences. As a result, travellers have a wider array of gastronomic options at their disposal, including regional delicacies, high-end dining experiences, and choices that cater to different dietary requirements (Frost et al, 2016).
-

Emerging Food Trends and Their Impact on Gastronomy Tourism

Gheorghe et. al (2014) identified emerging food trends that have marked gastronomy tourism in recent years:

- **Plant-Based and Sustainable Cuisine** and ecologically sensitive habits have led to an increased demand for vegetarian and vegan eating experiences. Restaurants and culinary tourist attractions are focusing on providing sustainable food sources, as well as experimenting with plant-based menus.
- **Street Food and Culinary Pop-Ups** have emerged as a notable component within the global gastronomic landscape. Through the use of mobile food establishments such as food trucks and temporary culinary gatherings like event pop-ups, visitors have the opportunity to partake in genuine and

innovative street gastronomy (Gheorghe et al, 2014)

- **Culinary Education and Workshops** are in high demand among individuals with a strong interest in gastronomy and who are also avid travellers. The range of activities includes classes focused on culinary techniques, such as cooking workshops, wine tastings, and sessions dedicated to the mastery of traditional food preparation methods.

Technological Advances and Gastronomy Tourism

Rapid technological advancements have impacted the development of gastronomy tourism around the world. Kivela & Crofts (2006) charted key moments where culinary arts and digital evolution cross-cut to transform the culinary arts landscape.

Online Platforms and Food Tourism

The advent of online platforms has transformed into a significant asset for both businesses and consumers within the culinary and hospitality sectors. These platforms provide a wide range of advantages:

- **Restaurant Discovery User Reviews and Recommendations** provide a means for tourists to explore a wide range of dining options. Restaurants can be identified based on many criteria such as preferred location, cuisine, budget, and user reviews. Individuals utilising online platforms can furnish ratings and recommendations. Travellers can learn more and enhance their decision-making abilities through reading others' first-hand experiences..
- **Food Applications** have become indispensable travel companions for enthusiasts, providing convenient and personalised dining experiences and helping influence travellers' dining choicess.
- **Reservations and booking technology** facilitate the process of reservations, ensuring patrons can be accommodated at their desired dining establishment.
- **Food Safety and Hygiene** programmes currently offer real-time updates regarding restaurant sanitation and adherence to safety laws, thereby allowing individuals to dine and feel reassured, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Trends and Challenges in Gastronomy Tourism

As the field of gastronomy tourism continues to develop, industry stakeholders must be aware of emerging trends and future challenges that will impact how the industry grows and develops.

- **Sustainable Gastronomy** refers to the significant role that environmentally friendly practices play in tourists' culinary preferences. Tourists have a strong

preference for geographical areas and activities that prioritise social and environmental responsibility (Frost et al, 20166).

- **Culinary Innovation** points to the emergence of novel culinary trends, fusion cuisines, and inventive dining ideas that are promising for the growth and development of gastronomy tourism..
- **Culinary Tourism Technology** looks to the rise in virtual and augmented reality experiences, AI-powered suggestions, and immersive culinary tales.
- **Culinary Education** institutions offering courses, workshops, and culinary programs can attract an increasing number of students. The provision of immersive and genuine culinary experiences can be an area for future growth.
- **Maintaining the authenticity** of culinary experiences is becoming an increasingly difficult task within the context of gastronomy tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2003). There is a possibility that the commercialisation and the influx of mass tourism may have a detrimental effect on authentic local flavours and cultural traditions. The preservation of traditional cuisine's purity, whilst catering to global visitors will become a crucial concern for gastronomes and culinary experience designers.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a concise overview of the significant changes in the field of gastronomy tourism. It is crucial to highlight the need to maintain an equilibrium between conventional practices and novel approaches within the realm of food tourism. Recognising the dynamic and evolving nature of gourmet tourism is of paramount importance. The sector is currently shaped by technological breakthroughs, travellers' growing preferences, and the emergence of new culinary trends. Acknowledging the ongoing evolution of gourmet tourism and the consequent need for businesses and destinations to adapt in order to remain relevant, the continuous advancement of technology presents opportunities for innovation in gastronomy tourism. However, the extent to which technology should be applied in this context remains a dilemma. The behavioural evolution of consumer choices is another issue that remains a challenge for widening the scope of gastronomic tourism around the world.



Robotic Gastronomy Experience and its Consequences

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Introduction

Food is the first element among the six facets of tourism, which also include “hospitality, travel, visit, shopping, and entertaining” (Guan et.al, 2022, p.3483). It stands out as a significant driver that draws food enthusiasts to specific tourist destinations (Guan et al., 2022). Although food holds a significant space in the field, the restaurant industry landscape underwent a profound transformation due to the unforeseen impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a global downturn in sales. These challenges reverberated across the restaurant industry and transcended geographical boundaries, resulting in significant setbacks in both sales and service operations. This unprecedented challenge compelled organisations to seek alternative service delivery methods (Kabadayi et al., 2020).

The advent of intelligent service robots is a transformative prospect for the tourism and catering industry. Sectors with a hospitality focus, including tourism and hotel catering, are progressively integrating artificial intelligence and service robots into their service operations. A notable illustration is the operationalisation of the world’s first robot hotel, Henn-na, in Japan in 2015 (Seo & Lee, 2021). Another example is the Hangzhou FlyZoo Hotel, which has entrusted tasks like hotel check-in, meal delivery, and check-out to robots, and “Connie” the robot at the Hilton provides concierge services (Seo & Lee, 2021). Haidilao Hot Pot deploys many robot employees in the front hall and back kitchen. Qianxi Robotics Group,

a subsidiary of Country Garden, has ingeniously delegated a substantial portion of the frontline services in the traditional catering industry to robots. This paradigm shift in technology reflects a global trend towards the incorporation of robotics into hospitality services.

A parallel surge is reported in the field of service robotics. The global market is projected to be valued at 21,2619.7 million USD by 2026, rising from 23,577.1 million USD in 2020 (Chen & Girish, 2023). The Asia-Pacific region is anticipated to dominate this shift, and the widespread use of service robots is expected to become a part of people's everyday lives (Chen et al., 2022). The Robotics Industries Association (2019) has documented a rising trend in the utilisation of robots in sectors marked by human interaction, encompassing airports, museums, travel agencies, cruises, hotels, and restaurants. The incorporation of robots not only fosters economic growth but also amplifies productivity within organisations (Taylor, 2019). These perspectives underscore the imminence of service robots, poised to reshape the landscape of service delivery systems.

Nevertheless, given the conventional perception of hospitality as a people-centric industry, where human interactions are the cornerstone (Seyitoglu et al., 2021), deploying service robots may dilute the overall service experience (Fuste-Forne, 2021). In the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a general preference for human services (El-Said & Hajri, 2022). However, the advent of the pandemic swiftly altered customer preferences (Wang & Wang, 2021), ushering in discernible shifts in customer behaviour (Prentice et al., 2022). In response to the pandemic, there was a substantial surge in "un-tact" economic activities, denoting the execution of tasks without direct contact with others (Lee, 2020). The initiation of physically distant services was facilitated through contactless services, with robots emerging as the predominant technological tool in this evolving landscape (Seyitoglu & Ivanov, 2021).

The integration of service robots in the hospitality industry can spark interest among customers, fostering a desire for interaction with robots and crafting a distinctive and novel experience (Choi et al., 2019). Simultaneously, this adoption can enhance operational efficiency, offering enterprises a competitive edge (Yu & Ngan, 2019). In the foreseeable future, a more profound integration of robots into the fabric of the hospitality industry can be anticipated, catalysing substantial development in the market for service robots.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the need for contactless services, the introduction of innovative service methods such as intelligent reception, unmanned retail, and unmanned distribution in the tourism and catering industry can not only effectively mitigate the risk of cross-infection but also establish the groundwork for the widespread acceptance of service robots in these sectors in the future (Jang & Lee, 2020). Robot service offers a new opportunity in the tourism industry, capable of influencing and reshaping the customer experience (Borghi & Mariani, 2021; Seo & Lee, 2021). In navigating this landscape, managers are tasked with understanding how the transition from service provision led by

frontline personnel to service provision led by service robots will impact customers' perceived value of the experience, their satisfaction levels, and, consequently, their behavioural intentions.

In recent years, service robots have emerged as a central topic of discussion within academic discourse. This study looks to understand the extent of customer acceptance of robotic gastronomic experiences. The dynamics of robot-customer relationships primarily pivot on technology adoption, interaction dynamics, and the overarching service experience (Shin, 2022). Recent inquiries into restaurant service robots have predominantly delved into aspects such as labour productivity and service quality (Shimmura et al., 2020), brand experience (Hwang et al., 2021a), brand loyalty (Hwang et al., 2021b, 2022a), customer preferences (Lu et al., 2021), authenticity (Hwang et al., 2022b), and the acceptance of technology (Seo & Lee, 2021; El-Said & Hajri, 2022; Kao & Hwang, 2023). However, explorations into the human-automation interaction within the hospitality domain remain scant, particularly concerning the nuanced experiences of customers regarding automation technology (e.g., Tung and Law, 2017). The focus placed on investigating consumer behavioural perspectives associated with service robots has been limited, and studies exploring the interactions of robots with customers in frontline roles are few and far between (Blanche et al., 2021; Borghi & Mariani, 2021). Numerous aspects invite further exploration, such as the potential impact of robots on customer behaviour within gastronomic services, the value they bring to customers, and the potential existence of contingent factors influencing these dynamics.

In response to the practical demands of the natural world and recognising the significance of theoretical exploration, this book chapter employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to undertake a survey-based investigation involving consumers of robotic gastronomic experiences. The primary objective is to delve into the repercussions of robotic gastronomic experiences on customers' utilitarian and hedonic values, satisfaction levels, and approach behaviour. The theoretical orientation of this study is poised to contribute substantially to the existing body of knowledge in service robotics, particularly by unravelling the intricacies of customers' approach behaviour toward restaurant service robots. On a pragmatic level, the study aspires to shed light on the feasibility of integrating restaurant service robots into the future landscape, offering valuable insights into the practical implications of such advancements.

Literature Review & Hypotheses

Robotic gastronomy, at the nexus of robotics and culinary arts, constitutes a paradigm shift in gastronomic practices. This convergence entails a comprehensive integration of robotic systems, automating tasks ranging from food handling to customer service interactions (Ma et al., 2023). The ramifications extend beyond mere operational efficiency, encompassing improved throughput, quality control mechanisms, and a strategic response to labour shortages in the culinary domain

(Huang & Liu, 2022). Noteworthy advancements extend the trajectory of innovation by incorporating digital fabrication technologies, introducing new dimensions of creativity in gastronomy (Kilichan & Yilmaz, 2020). Concurrently, there exists a significant theoretical evolution in gastronomy, with the emergence of computational gastronomy as an interdisciplinary field leveraging data analysis techniques to inform culinary processes, yielding novel and inventive outcomes. Moreover, the integration of robotic systems in the hospitality and tourism sectors—addressing concerns surrounding labour costs and shortages—underscores a broader commitment to enhancing customer experiences through continuous and technologically mediated service provision.

The customer's overall encounter is shaped by their engagement with either a product, service, or establishment. These engagements yield cognitive, affective, social, and relational reactions (Agarwal & Mohan, 2021). Cognition pertains to the convictions or cogitations that an individual possesses regarding an entity and its characteristics. These beliefs can influence attitudes and behaviour. Within the shopping experience, stimuli elicit both emotional and cognitive reactions, which contribute to the overall affective process and value of the encounter (Rizvi & Popli, 2021). Attitudes encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects, thereby requiring a holistic examination of all three constituents in order to grasp the association between attitude and behaviour (Batat, 2022). A consumer's cognitive and affective evaluations exert a substantial influence on their perception and appraisal (Sahhar et al., 2022).

Service robots are being used more frequently across multiple domains such as the service sector, where they are seen as entities that interact with society (Letheren et al., 2021). In the hospitality industry, high-tech innovation is integrated into service delivery, and customers perceive robots as social agents (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2021). Service robots possess the ability to engage with and provide services to clientele, rendering them important within the tourism and hospitality sector (Reis et al., 2020). In this particular industry, the cognitive aspects of competence and composure are regarded as influential determinants of consumers' intentions (De Keyser & Kunz, 2022). Consequently, the presence of anthropomorphic characteristics in robots has the potential to promote a heightened sense of ease and comfort for individuals when spending time with them, thereby emphasising the crucial role that service robots assume in catering to the needs of customers within the tourism and hospitality industry (Blut et al., 2021).

Competence is a fundamental aspect that defines an entity in the realm of social cognition, thereby assuming a crucial function in the advancement of human-robot interaction in real-life situations. Studies have shown that perceptions of competence in robots are associated with individuals' impressions of the robot's service quality and future encounters (Belanche et al., 2019). Competence reflects the robot's ability to perform tasks accurately and reliably, encompassing assessments of intelligence, skill, and efficacy (Belanche et al., 2021). This attribute is considered important and inherent in service robots, given their utilitarian goals. Gaining a comprehensive understanding and expertise in the field of robotics can greatly improve their

efficiency in providing services and enhance user experiences. (Liu et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2021).

Competence, along with warmth, have a remarkable impact on shaping customers' utilitarian and hedonic values, levels of satisfaction, and approach behaviour towards robots (Scheunemann et al., 2020). In utilitarian service contexts, customers exhibit a greater willingness to use a service robot that is perceived as competent (Wu et al., 2021). Furthermore, customers' intention to utilise robots is influenced by their perception of the physical appearance of the robot as well as the specific context in which the service is being provided (Grewal et al., 2020).

“Coolness” is a socially constructed, positive trait that is often associated with dynamic and subjective cultural objects like people, products, and brands (Warren et al., 2019). The utilisation of service robots in various industries, including the hospitality and retail sectors, has been observed to elicit a favourable response from customers, as indicated by higher ratings in online reviews specifically pertaining to robots as opposed to reviews not related to robots (Peláez & Kyriakou, 2008). The concept of “coolness” falls under the cognitive domain and is subject to the influence of various factors, such as defiance, desirability, technological innovation, dependability, appeal, and user-friendliness (Tiwari et al., 2021).

Customer satisfaction is an important component of the robot service experience, and it is viewed as the contentment of customers after their interaction with restaurant service robots (Chen & Girish, 2023). Previous investigations have primarily concentrated on regarding satisfaction as the affective element and classifying it as a crucial facet of the encounter with robotic services (Huang et al., 2021). The contentment of a consumer establishes their satisfaction with the utilisation of any merchandise or facility (Thirumalai & Sinha, 2005). Within the domain of restaurant service robots, the emphasis is placed on the indirect conduct of consumers and their contentment with the calibre of service dispensed by the robots (Belanche et al., 2021). Service experiences in the culinary arts involve customers cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. Dynamic interactions and customers' active involvement play a crucial role in shaping these experiences.

The competence and “coolness” of robotic gastronomic encounters engender a concomitant effect that has a profound influence on both utilitarian and hedonic values. Competent automatons adeptly carry out assigned tasks, thereby engendering positive utilitarian values which are focused on the practical aspects of the experience (Wu et al., 2021; Lin & Mattila, 2021). Concurrently, the coolness factor, characterised by its anthropomorphic allure and innovative attributes, contributes to positive hedonic values which are centred around the emotional aspects of the encounter (McLeay et al., 2021). The symbiotic relationship between competence and coolness is complementary, thereby augmenting the overall dining experience (Chen & Girish, 2023; Hyun et al., 2023). This harmonious interplay transcends the mundane nature of a routine activity, transforming it into a multisensory odyssey that satiates both practical and emotional needs. The perception of the synergistic nature of competence and coolness by customers

significantly shapes their overall utilitarian and hedonic values throughout the course of their robotic gastronomic encounters. Also, the integration of utilitarian and hedonic attributes in a robotic gastronomic encounter creates a comprehensive experience of satisfaction that goes beyond operational efficiency or hedonic enjoyment. It is about the orchestrated fusion of these elements, transforming dining into a symphony of satisfaction.

Based on this literature review the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Robotic gastronomic experience has a significant and positive impact on hedonic value.*
- H2: Robotic gastronomic experience has a significant and positive impact on utilitarian value.*
- H3: Robotic gastronomic experience has a significant and positive impact on satisfaction.*
- H4: Utilitarian value has a significant and positive impact on satisfaction.*
- H5: Hedonic value has a significant and positive impact on satisfaction.*
- H6: Hedonic value has a significant and positive impact on approach behaviour.*
- H7: Satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on approach behaviour.*
- H8: Utilitarian value has a significant and positive impact on approach behaviour.*

Methods

This research employed an online survey to gather information from participants aged 18 and above, targeting those with firsthand experience with service robot restaurants in the United States. To ensure the relevance of respondents, a screening question was included, specifically asking whether they had patronage experience in a service robot restaurant. Only those who answered affirmatively were considered as valid samples. The data collection took place on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a widely used online survey platform in the fields of hospitality and tourism (Ali et al., 2020). This study used a 'self-selection' sampling method, chosen because it is suitable when participants voluntarily choose to engage in research. To maintain data integrity, participants with a minimum of 95% Human Intelligence were selected, and two attention check questions were incorporated into the questionnaire. Responses lacking completeness or failing the attention check were excluded from the final dataset. Consequently, a total of 302 valid responses formed the basis for subsequent analysis. The sample size was determined through Power analysis, ensuring it met the necessary conditions. Human intelligence is a filter inside Amazon Mturk. The platform assigns a score to respondents based on several factors. The demographic distribution indicated that over half of the respondents were male (52.3%). Among the total respondents, 43.5% fell within the 18 to 34 age range. Full-time employees constituted less than half of the respondents (41.8%), and approximately 51% reported having been patrons at service robot restaurants

once, followed by those with two-time patronage experiences (36.1%).

The questionnaire items underwent adaptation and slight modifications in alignment with the context of this study, using validated scale items from previous research. A pilot study, in Florida, USA, involving 13 graduate students and 2 faculty members within a hospitality management program was conducted to assess the scale reliability. The construct of robotic gastronomy experience was conceptualised as a higher-order construct with two dimensions: Competence and Coolness. Competence was gauged using three scale items adapted from Scott et al. (2013), while Coolness employed four scale items adapted from Chen and Girish (2023). Both Utilitarian and Hedonic values were measured with three scale items each, adopted from Shin et al. (2019). Satisfaction was evaluated using three scale items developed by Lee and Shin (2018). Approach behaviour was quantified with three items adapted from Gursoy et al. (2019) and Huang et al. (2017). All scale items were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Table 1 below mentions the items under each construct.

To mitigate common method variance, various methodological and statistical strategies were employed. First, different cover stories were used for each measurement scale to establish psychological separation among respondents. Second, the questionnaire was intentionally kept concise, comprising only 21 items to prevent respondent fatigue and confusion, which could potentially compromise the accuracy of responses. Third, distinct measurement scales were employed for independent and dependent variables. Harman's single-factor test was also conducted, revealing that a single factor did not account for the majority of the variance. Consequently, common method bias was deemed unlikely to have significantly impacted this study.

Results

To examine the research model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using smartPLS 3.0. The results from Mardia's coefficients indicated a departure from multivariate normal distribution in the data, justifying the preference for PLS-SEM as the chosen method to test the research model (Ali et al., 2018). The analysis with smartPLS comprised two steps: measurement model analysis and structural model assessment. In accordance with Ali et al. (2018), reflective constructs were validated using composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All values surpassed the recommended thresholds, affirming the reliability and validity of each construct (Refer to Table 1). Additionally, discriminant validity was established through Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) procedure.

Table 1, validity and reliability

Constructs	Items	Statements	Loadings	AVE	Cornbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Competence	Comp1	I feel that service robot performed in a competent manner	0.892	0.611	0.656	0.766
	Comp2	I feel that service robot performed in an intelligent manner	0.902			
	Comp3	I feel that service robot was well trained	0.747			
Coolness	Cool1	When I think of things that are cool, objects like service robot in this restaurant will come to my mind	0.767	0.743	0.824	0.839
	Cool2	I feel that robot in this restaurant is cool	0.915			
	Cool3	It is cool how robot in this restaurant works	0.896			
Utilitarian Value	UV1	Eating at this restaurant was pragmatic and economical	0.713	0.633	0.721	0.756
	UV2	It was worth the money to eat at this restaurant	0.846			
	UV3	Service at this restaurant was quick	0.822			
Hedonic Value	HV1	Eating out at this restaurant was fun and pleasant	0.867	0.794	0.874	0.938
	HV2	The dining experience at this restaurant was truly a joy	0.922			
	HV3	During the dining experience, I felt the excitement of searching for food	0.884			
Satisfaction	Sat1	I am satisfied with using robot at this restaurant	0.631	0.693	0.763	0.801
	Sat2	I feel robot has many advantages	0.919			
	Sat3	My experience using robot has always been pleasant	0.914			
Approach Behavior	App1	I am willing to receive robots' service at this restaurant	0.916	0.867	0.923	0.923
	App2	I feel robot has many advantages	0.930			
	App3	My experience using robot has always been pleasant	0.946			

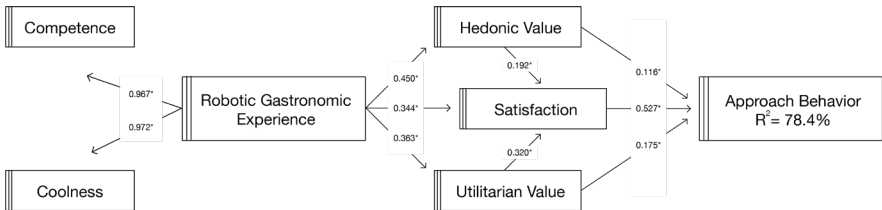
Next, a structural model was used to assess the hypothesised relationships between the robotic service experience and hedonic and utilitarian values. The size of bootstrapping was 5,000. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Beta	T Value	P Value	Decision
H1 Robotic Gas Experience > Hedonic Value	0.450	5.381	0.000	Supported
H2 Robotic Gas Experience > Satisfaction	0.344	2.861	0.004	Supported
H3 Robotic Gas Experience > Utilitarian Value	0.363	3.502	0.000	Supported
H4 Utilitarian Value > Satisfaction	0.320	3.159	0.002	Supported
H5 Hedonic Value > Satisfaction	0.192	2.813	0.000	Supported
H6 Hedonic Value > Approach Behavior	0.116	3.237	0.000	Supported
H7 Satisfaction > Approach Behavior	0.527	5.168	0.000	Supported
H8 Utilitarian Value > Approach Behavior	0.175	2.030	0.003	Supported

Both the dimensions of robotic gastronomy experience i.e., competence and coolness are statistically significant. Robotic gastronomy experience was found to have a strong and positive influence on hedonic value ($\beta=0.450$, $p<0.001$), satisfaction ($\beta=0.344$, $p<0.05$), and utilitarian value ($\beta=0.363$, $p<0.001$). Thus, the hypotheses H1 to H3 were supported. Moreover, utilitarian value ($\beta=0.320$, $p<0.001$) and hedonic value ($\beta=0.192$, $p<0.001$) also had a positive and significant effect on satisfaction, thus, supporting H4 and H5. Lastly, approach behaviour was found to be strongly and positively influenced by hedonic value ($\beta=0.116$, $p<0.001$), satisfaction ($\beta=0.527$, $p<0.05$), and utilitarian value ($\beta=0.175$, $p<0.05$). Thus, the hypotheses H6 to H8 were also supported. Lastly, as shown in Fig. 10.1, robotic gastronomy experience, hedonic value, utilitarian value, and satisfaction altogether explain 78.4% of variance in consumer's approach behaviour towards service robots in a restaurant.

Fig. 1: Structural Model



* P= 0.05

Discussion and Implications

This study aimed to examine the effects of robotic gastronomic experiences on customers' utilitarian and hedonic values, satisfaction levels, and approach behaviour. Data collected from participants aged 18 and above, with firsthand experience frequenting service robot restaurants in the USA was subjected to PLS-SEM. Results show that robotic gastronomic experience has two significant dimensions: competence and coolness. These results are in line with previous studies (Chen & Girish, 2023; Chen & Girish, 2022; Scott et al., 2013). Moreover, findings indicated a significant and positive impact of robotic gastronomy experience on hedonic value, satisfaction, and utilitarian value. These findings also corroborate the findings from previous studies (Chen & Girish, 2023; Hyun et al., 2023; Lin & Mattila, 2021; McLeay et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, findings also indicate that utilitarian value and hedonic value had a positive and significant effect on satisfaction, supporting previous literature (Guan et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2019). Lastly, approach behaviour was found to be strongly and positively influenced by hedonic value, satisfaction, and utilitarian value. These findings also support previous literature (Guan et al., 2022; Milman et al., 2020; de Kervenoael et al., 2020).

While advancements in robot research have been notable, this paper contributes to the field in several key aspects. First, it delves into the factors shaping customers'

behavioural intentions towards robot-operated restaurants, thus enriching the landscape of research studies on robots. Unlike traditional service robots confined to structured and controlled environments, modern counterparts operate in chaotic settings, managing multiple stakeholders and navigating complex human interactions (Caic et al., 2019). Efficiency becomes paramount in the prevailing labour market. Consequently, our study examines how the competence of robots is tested during the service delivery process, influencing customers' perceptions and behaviour. The results underscore that the competence of restaurant service robots has a positive impact on customer perceptions. These service robots exhibit social engagement capabilities (Belanche et al., 2020), influencing customers' hedonic value. The enhanced anthropomorphic characteristics of service robots, driven by advancements in robotics technology, likely contribute to triggering both hedonic and utilitarian values among customers. Respondents expressed satisfaction with the competence of service robots, highlighting the potential benefits for organisations in leveraging their efficiency for tasks executed round the clock with rapid computing power and robust physical abilities (Huang and Rust, 2018).

This research supports the notion that robots excel in providing timely and error-free service, fostering customer confidence and satisfaction (Belanche et al., 2021). In the context of this model, there is theoretical significance in exploring the role of robotic gastronomic experience, hedonic and utilitarian values, and satisfaction in shaping customer approach behaviour. Diverging from previous studies that primarily focus on customers' trust in robots (Tussyadiah, 2020) and usage intentions (Huang et al., 2021), our study centres on customers' approach behaviour towards robot-operated restaurants and their robotic gastronomic experience, contributing a nuanced perspective to the evolving body of research on robots.

The exploration of service robots in restaurant settings not only advances our understanding of customer behaviour but also underscores the imperative of integrating service robots in future operations. Over the last three decades, labour costs have seen a substantial surge, while simultaneously, the cost of robots has witnessed a 50% reduction, setting the stage for increased robot adoption (Chuah et al., 2022). Projections indicate that the 'robot economy' is poised to create 133 million new jobs by 2025 (Hwang et al., 2020). Amidst these transformations, comprehending customer approach behaviour in the service industry becomes pivotal. Fong et al. (2003) emphasised the pivotal role of socially interactive robots in influencing human behaviour. This study delves into the constructs of competence (from a utility perspective) and coolness (from a hedonic perspective) of robots to unravel customers' perceptions and approach behaviour towards robotic gastronomic experiences. The findings affirm that restaurant service robots effectively align with customer expectations in the service delivery process. Moreover, the study establishes that the attributes of competence and coolness in service robots wield a direct influence on customers' perceptions and approach behaviour. The ever-evolving landscape of robotics technology necessitates the incorporation of traits like competence and coolness in service robots to elevate customers' service experiences and shape their approach behaviour. Notably, the study underscores that higher levels of coolness and competence in robots correlate with greater

perceived value by customers. Acknowledging the current immaturity of robot applications in the industry, managers must be attuned to customer stereotypes and proactively mitigate the impact of service errors stemming from robot failures, downtime, program errors, and other service shortcomings.

Similar to any other research study, this study is also subject to several limitations. This study used self-selection sampling and focused on data collection from one platform, i.e., Amazon mTurk. Moreover, a cross-sectional design was used for this study, which cannot consider the changes in this study's constructs over a period. Lastly, the study did not see the specific characteristics of service robots or restaurants and their influence on consumer' perceptions and behaviours. These limitations can be considered in future research. Based on the findings of the study and its limitations, the article concludes with some open-ended questions for further discussion. These questions aim to guide future researchers in conducting targeted studies that contribute to the refinement and practical implementation of service robots in the gastronomic and hospitality industries.

1. In the context of the gastronomic industry, how do specific design features of service robots, such as facial expressions, verbal communication abilities, or physical dexterity, impact customers' perceptions of competence and coolness, and how might these features be optimised for enhanced customer engagement?
2. As the integration of service robots becomes more prevalent post-pandemic, what specific strategies can be implemented to address potential concerns or resistance from customers regarding the use of robots in gastronomic services, and how can these strategies be tailored to different cultural contexts?
3. Considering the findings on the impact of competence and coolness on customer perceptions and approach behaviour, what targeted interventions or enhancements in service robot development can be explored to further elevate customer satisfaction, and how can these improvements be practically implemented within real-world gastronomic settings??
4. To better understand the nuanced dynamics of customer-service robot interactions, what role does the level of personalization play in shaping customer preferences and satisfaction? How can future service robots be designed to balance personalization with efficiency, particularly in the gastronomic and hospitality sectors?
5. Exploring the potential workforce implications, what are the specific skills and training programs that can be introduced to prepare hospitality professionals for collaborating with service robots, and how can this collaboration contribute to job enrichment rather than displacement?

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