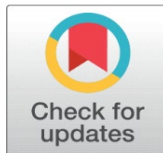
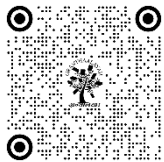


CULINARY EDUCATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TOURIST DECISION-MAKING: A STUDY OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact of culinary education on the tourist decision-making process by explaining how food-related learning experiences, such as culinary schools, cooking classes, and food tours, shape tourists' perceptions of their choices in destinations, activities, and experiences. The study encompasses developing trends in culinary tourism, as culinary education significantly aligns with tourism and culture, emphasizing experiential food travel that extends beyond food events and fosters cross-cultural exchange.

The influence of culinary education has been an important element of the food tourism industry, which plays a crucial role by influencing tourist decisions in destination selection and supporting the promotion of a destination. However, the ability and prospects of culinary education have not been fully recognized as competitive advantages by most practitioners in the food tourism industry. Little is known about how culinary education can affect tourists' decisions in selecting.

Keywords: Culinary Education, Experiential Travel, Tourist Decision, Travel Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has completely changed in the last few decades: it moved from classical sightseeing to personal experience-based experiences. By showcasing more profound patterns for evolving attractions, such as culinary tourism, where food is the core of the travel experience, destination travel has made its most significant diversion. Food, for many tourists, is a core part of travel; it also gets one much closer to seeing the culture, traditions, and way of life of a destination. Interest in such aspects of food extends beyond, in the form of participating in cooking classes, food festivals, and culinary tours.

One form of the many food-related experiences is culinary education (through culinary schools, cooking workshops, or food tours), which has become one of the existing lures for tourism. It allows the tourists to savor the local food at its native destination, learn from traditional cooking techniques, and come into contact with local chefs and food artisans. These include destinations that specifically attract tourists with the promise of their positioning in cooking schools or immersive food-related experiences.

When tourism is viewed from the tourist's perspective, culinary tourism offers insights even about the role of food education in promoting travel decisions. Many tourists engaging in culinary education make their travel decisions based

on how much education they find at the destination, the authenticity of the food experience, and lastly, the fact that they want to have firsthand empirical knowledge of cooking. Culinary schools will, of course, add not only to the knowledge of these tourists about the local food culture but also promote appreciation for the sustainability of local ingredients and ethical food practices.

This paper analyzes the aspect of how culinary education influences decision-making during tourist travel and the way tourists engage with destinations. The paper examines tourists' motivations to take part in such programs and how participation in culinary education defines their travel expectations and post-trip behaviors. These dynamics are crucial to tourism stakeholders, culinary institutions, and local governments that leverage such developments toward travel and culinary tourism.

The tourists' decision-making process is challenging; it varies with the psychological, social, and environmental factors governing individual experiences. Food is one of the pertinent bases of decision-making. With increasing prominence given to food during travel experiences, food influences tourists' choice-making in countless ways, and many researchers have addressed those influences (**Richards, 2004**). Culinary tourism offers tourists a connection to a destination that sightseeing or conventional tourism cannot provide. Food-related activities, such as cooking classes, food tours, or market visits, enable tourists to engage intimately with the destination, ensuring that food remains a central consideration in their destination choice. **Athanasopoulou (2020)** noted that authenticity is one of the prime motives for food tourists, especially when culinary experiences are perceived as traditional, local, or cultural. In this context, culinary education provides a platform for authenticity, as many tourists are drawn to regions where they can learn traditional cooking and food preparation methods from local experts. As tourists become more discerning with their travel selections, there is a growing expectation for food experiences that go beyond eating to include hands-on education, cultural immersion, and learning culinary skills. **Bessière (1998)** points out that, in essence, culinary heritage, from traditional methods of cooking to the sourcing of local ingredients, enhances the local identity and attracts tourists who look for an authentic experience. At times, food choices of the tourists are shaped by the culinary knowledge of a destination, and this culinary knowledge influences the tourists in making their travel decision (**Kapelari et al., 2020**).

2. CULINARY TOURISM AND THE ROLE OF CULINARY EDUCATION

There is no doubt that culinary education plays an important role in developing and sustaining culinary tourism. According to **Hall and Mitchell (2006)**, culinary tourism can be defined by the diversification of food experiences, leading travelers to indulge in the culinary traditions and practices of a certain region. Indeed, there is an increasing trend in culinary schools, cooking workshops, and food tours among tourists visiting places to learn how food is consumed and lived there. Such learning experiences are appealing to tourists who seek realness, authenticity, or even deeper engagement with the local community through a more personalized engagement in local food traditions.

Culinary education will, on one side, not only enrich the tourist experience but also enhance the local economy while contributing to the local food culture. Every year, for instance, Le Cordon Bleu boasts thousands of international students across the Commonwealth among other global campuses, as it is one of the world's most prestigious culinary institutions. Its presence and reputation all over the globe have made it one of the huge players in the tourism business; that is, it attracts tourists to come to visit and enter its scholarly programs. Apart from this, usually, such schools have proven to be vehicle catalysts in developing food tourism infrastructure at different destinations, which would be beneficial towards the overall economic growth by rallying new restaurants, food markets, and other culinary-related businesses.

Some of those countries, alongside Italy, Thailand, and Japan, that have established food-related cultures and heritage have created customized culinary tourism programs and culinary education opportunities that take tourists from other countries to experience the techniques taught by local chefs and food artisans. The tourist gets more than just cooking skills, as he/she go home with a richer understanding of the history, ingredients, and cultural significance behind local dishes.

Culinary education often leads to culinary discovery within the landscape of culinary tourism, which increases the tourist and community engagement, thereby encouraging economic exchange from the culinary tourist (**Yun et al., 2011**).

There have been some studies focusing on culinary education from the tourist's standpoint and how food-related learning activity modifies travel behavior. What sometimes motivates culinary tourism is a desire to learn about the

culture of a region through its foods. Tourists harbor culinary learning not only for the sake of acquiring knowledge and skills but also to experience local culture differently. Cooking and tasting local food offer integrated sensory experiences where tourists engage thoroughly with a destination's food culture, which contributes to a more genuine travel experience. By encouraging the use of local ingredients and traditional cooking techniques, culinary education improves the decision-making of tourists and creates hands-on experiences (**Prayag et al., 2020**).

Furthermore, the benefits of culinary education have long-term benefits for tourists, bringing an appreciation of food, some culinary skills, and an emotional bond with the destination. For instance, food tourists who have taken cooking courses will often recreate the dishes they learned on their travels long after returning home. This constitutes a strong element in culinary tourism, making it not merely a short-time engagement with the destination but one that will influence tourists' food choices and culinary habits throughout their lives. In one of the studies, **Guan et al. (2019)** highlight that "food heritagization" can be enhanced while maintained, while encouraging traditional cooking methods and local ingredient sourcing, further influencing tourist perception and enhancing their experiences. Hence, this culinary authenticity reshapes the local tourism scenario while attracting visitors seeking authentic experiences. Similarly, **Niedbala et al. (2020)** emphasize that culinary tourism driven by local food and ingredients improves tourist attraction. Creation of culinary trails that showcase culinary heritage may impact tourist decisions while fostering community entrepreneurship in a destination. **Brokaj (2014)** addressed that cooking classes showcase traditional cooking techniques, motivating tourists in selecting food tourism destinations, thereby fostering community pride and encouraging food-related economic activities. Further, it not only emphasizes cooking methods or techniques, but also increases culinary awareness among food tourists while appreciating the local culinary offerings (**Pivarski et al., 2023**).

Some studies indicated that culinary education is also a medium for social interaction. Tourists and locals exchange knowledge, contributing not only to the tourists' understanding of the food culture but also to the economic benefit of the host community. This exchange serves to promote cultural appreciation and supports social intermingling between tourists and locals (**Telfer & Wall, 1996**). **Cohen and Avieli (2004)** discuss how culinary education promotes tourist decision-making by shifting focus toward traditional ways of cooking and local ingredient sourcing, thus reforming community tourism. This, in turn, brings about authentic experiences and attractiveness to tourists interested in local culture and cuisine, and this proceeds to assist local economies.

3. CULINARY EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Culinary education is now associated with one of the rising sustainable tourism trends. Distinctive to sustainable food practices, some culinary programs focus more on utilizing local and seasonal ingredients, waste minimization while cooking, and ethically sourcing food. Accordingly, culinary schools promote these ideas and contribute to the broader sustainability movement in the tourism industry. Tourists taking part in such educational experiences would learn about sustainable practices, thereby helping advance local food systems, which could inculcate greater responsibility in them as travelers. **Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012)** emphasize how authentic local cuisine in a community-based tourism setting draws tourists because of traditional cooking methods and local ingredient sourcing. Thus, the culinary education fosters cultural appreciation, influencing tourists' destination choices and promoting sustainable community development. **Cerquetti et al. (2022)** highlight that traditional cooking methods and local food sourcing are a part of intangible cultural heritage, which influence tourists' decision-making by promoting an authentic experience. Hence, this fosters community participation, strengthening cultural identity, while encouraging and supporting sustainable tourism development. Driven by traditional cuisine, culinary tourism may encourage visitor engagement and their passion for regional cooking techniques and ingredients encourages long-term use of traditional items, therefore benefiting local populations and changing the dynamics of tourism in rural areas (**Di-Clemente et al., 2020**).

Culinary education plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging responsible food practices among both locals and tourists. Through the use of local and seasonal ingredients, culinary schools support regional agriculture and reduce environmental impact. They also teach waste reduction techniques and ethical sourcing, fostering awareness of sustainability in the food chain. For tourists, participating in culinary experiences cultivates a deeper appreciation for cultural food heritage and promotes conscious consumption. Additionally, when culinary programs are community-based, they help empower local populations and distribute tourism benefits more equitably. In this way, culinary education not only enhances the tourist experience but also contributes meaningfully to environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability.

4. CULINARY EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON TOURIST DECISION MAKING

- **Enhances Destination Appeal:** Culinary learning opportunities (e.g., cooking classes, school visits) make destinations more attractive to experience-driven tourists.
- **Shapes Tourist Motivation:** Culinary education stimulates interest in food culture, often becoming a key motivation for choosing a particular destination.
- **Promotes Authentic Experiences:** Tourists associate culinary education with deeper cultural immersion, influencing them to favour destinations offering such experiences.
- **Influences Travel Planning:** Destinations with strong culinary offerings often become part of a traveler's decision-making process, especially for gastronomic tourists.
- **Encourages Exploration of Lesser-Known Areas:** Culinary education can draw tourists to rural or lesser-visited regions known for their food traditions, diversifying tourist flows.
- **Builds Destination Identity:** Culinary schools help establish and promote a region's food heritage, enhancing its brand as a food tourism hub.

5. CULINARY EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF ASSAM

Culinary education holds significant potential to influence the tourists' decisions while selecting their next travel destination. As tourists are becoming more active, seeking immersive and hands-on experiences, culinary education as an experience can fulfil the need for experiential travel while catering to the tourists. Culinary education, through cooking classes, culinary workshops, food tours, etc., may provide a deeper understanding of Assam's rich culinary heritage and its diversity. The state's culinary identity, influenced by ethnic communities, indigenous tribes and sub-tribes, age-old traditions, distinctive and unique food habits, etc., is yet to get its representation on a global stage. By institutionalizing culinary education through collaborations with local chefs, culinary institutes, and homestay owners, Assam can provide unique experiences that distinguish it from the rest. Such efforts can educate tourists about the state's rich food history while strengthening local community empowerment through skill development and economic involvement. Hence, it also encourages repeat visits among the tourists. Seasonal festivals like Rongali Bihu can be leveraged to offer food-focused tourism packages, allowing tourists to learn, taste, and participate in local culinary rituals. With appropriate marketing, policy support, and infrastructural development, culinary education in Assam cannot only influence tourist decision-making but also reshape the state's tourism narrative into one that is inclusive, authentic, and deeply rooted in cultural expression.

6. HYPOTHESES

This study shall test the following hypotheses:

H1: Culinary education experience has a significant impact on tourist motivation.

H2: Participation in culinary education experiences enhances tourists' travel satisfaction and revisit intention.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, a quantitative research approach was taken into account to provide a comprehensive analysis of the culinary education and its influence on tourists' decision-making, considering the state of Assam.

- 1) **Measurements:** The questionnaire, consisting of four sections, was used for collecting the data. Demographic information of the respondents (age, gender, education qualification, marital status), culinary education as an independent variable with 5 parameters, was measured. Similarly, three dependent variables as tourist motivation, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention, with 5 different parameters each, were measured using a 5-point Likert scale.
- 2) **Data Collection and Sample Size:** Three hundred fifty tourists were considered through a self-administered survey questionnaire. On the questionnaire, tourists were asked to rate various parameters regarding their

importance in culinary education. The data for this study were collected from the tourists visiting the state of Assam. Most respondents were approached personally, while understanding their willingness and interest in the study. As the majority have agreed to participate in the questionnaire, a short briefing was given to the tourists while explaining the research study.

- 3) **Sampling technique and statistical approach:** For this study, simple random sampling (probability sampling) has been used. On the other hand, for hypothesis testing, correlation analysis has been used.

8. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The demographic profile of the 350 respondents is given below. Table 1 represents the total frequencies of each demographic variable of the respondents. Whereas, Table 2 represents the frequency distribution of age of the respondents, where the category from 41-50 is significantly more followed by the age group of 31-40, then 21-30. The males have a higher participant frequency than the females (Table 3) at 55.7 percent and 44.3 percent, respectively. Among the respondents (Table 4), 43.4 percent are claimed as undergraduates, followed by secondary education at 26.9 percent and postgraduate at 22.3 percent. Table 5 shows that the marital status of the respondents is married, has the highest percentage of 74.9 percent.

Statistics					
		Age (years)	Gender	Education qualification	Marital status
N	Valid	350	350	350	350
	Missing	0	0	0	0

Table 1. Frequencies of each demographic variable

Age (years)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0- 20	9	2.6	2.6	2.6
	21-30	61	17.4	17.4	20.0
	31-40	82	23.4	23.4	43.4
	41-50	145	41.4	41.4	84.9
	51-60	53	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Total	350	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Frequency table of the Age of the respondents

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	195	55.7	55.7	55.7
	Female	155	44.3	44.3	100.0
	Total	350	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Frequency table of the Gender of the respondents

Education qualification					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary education	23	6.6	6.6	6.6
	Secondary education	94	26.9	26.9	33.4
	Under graduate	152	43.4	43.4	76.9
	Post graduate	78	22.3	22.3	99.1
	Other	3	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	350	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Frequency table of the Education qualification of the respondents

Marital status					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	262	74.9	74.9	74.9
	Unmarried	88	25.1	25.1	100.0
	Total	350	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Frequency table of marital status of the respondents

Table 6 indicates that culinary education experience is statistically significant with a p-value less than .001. Hence, tourists who had culinary education experience showed a higher level of motivation to engage with the destination. This suggests that culinary education is likely to have a positive influence on tourists' decision-making while selecting Assam as a food destination.

Correlations			
		Culinary education experience	Tourist Motivation
Culinary education experience	Pearson Correlation	--	
	N	350	
Tourist Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.949**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	350	350

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6. The correlation result of culinary education experience on tourist motivation.

Similarly, Table 7 indicates that culinary education significantly contributed to tourist satisfaction while encouraging revisit intention among them. This can be summarized as the engagement with the culinary education certainly provides valuable and hands-on experience to the tourist.

Correlations				
		Culinary education experience	Tourist satisfaction	Revisit Intention
Culinary education experience	Pearson Correlation	--		
	N	350		
Tourist satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.458**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		
	N	350	350	
Revisit Intention	Pearson Correlation	.948**	.496**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	350	350	350

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7. The correlation result of culinary education enhancing tourist satisfaction and encouraging revisit intention

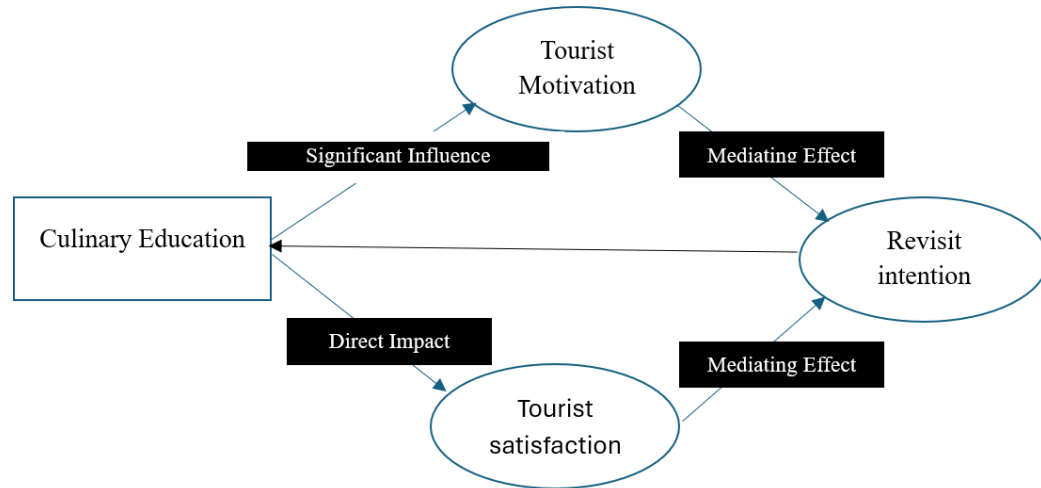


Fig 1. Relation framework of Culinary Education with Tourist Motivation & Satisfaction

9. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to analyze the impact that culinary education experiences have on tourist motivation and satisfaction, and encourage revisit intention, with the further objective of understanding the extent to which such experiences might help in destination attractiveness and visitor involvement. Based on collected and analyzed data, the findings support both hypotheses and thus indicate that culinary education indeed plays an important role in tourist behavior.

Firstly, the findings suggest that culinary education motivates the tourist. Hence, tourists who attended cooking classes, food workshops, or local gastronomy demonstrations were more inclined to interact with local food culture and traditions. This means that culinary education not only serves the purpose of entertainment, it also creates an interest in and appreciation of the local identity for the destination. For those areas rich with culinary heritage, such an offering will create a good opportunity for positioning food education as a key factor in their tourism offerings.

Secondly, the study suggests that culinary education positively affects tourist satisfaction and encourages repeat visits. Respondents reported a greater sense of satisfaction and enjoyment in their tourist activities when they actively learned about local cuisine and participated in cooking. The satisfaction can be gained from food tasting, as well as the experience of learning cooking processes, cultural significance, and narratives related to traditional dishes. These learning experiences allowed the tourists to connect with the destination in a more genuine, profound way while engraining the memory of the trip within them and providing positive emotional resonance.

These results point out that culinary education is an important element in stimulating the pull factors (motivation) and experiential value (satisfaction) in tourism. And when tourism planning embraces culinary schools, workshops, or food learning in some way, destinations shall indeed attract a population consisting mainly of food tourists.

The implications of these findings are relevant for a state like Assam, where culinary heritage is rich and diversified. Culinary education has the potential to act as a link between tourism and local development, while encouraging community participation, cultural preservation, and even economic empowerment. Local chefs, farmers, food artisans, and educators can be engaged to create programs that reflect authentic food customs, thus ensuring that tourism development remains inclusive and locally rooted.

To conclude, culinary education is way more than just a niche tourist activity; it is a medium for cultural exchange, engagement, interaction, and emotion. If well integrated into the tourism experience, it works on motivating visitors and adding value to their satisfaction, and contributing to responsible travel. Besides, an investment in these experiences would help the state of Assam to create a positive impact on the global tourism map.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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