

Culinary Delights in Tourism and Hospitality: A Review and Future Research Prospects

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive descriptive analysis of culinary tourism literature. We conducted meticulous research, identifying 231 relevant articles from the Scopus database using keywords such as 'Food Tourism', 'Culinary Tourism', 'Gastronomy', 'Tourist Destination' and 'Tourism Development'. The analysis covered various aspects, including the distribution of publications over the years, prominent journals, authorship patterns, bibliographic coupling and theoretical perspectives. Our study employed rigorous selection criteria, focusing exclusively on English language articles related to culinary tourism. By examining these scholarly works, we aim to provide insights into the evolving landscape of culinary tourism research, offering valuable information to academics, practitioners and policymakers interested in this dynamic field. Through this endeavour, we contribute to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship in culinary tourism, fostering a deeper understanding of its multifaceted dimensions and implications.

Keywords

Culinary tourism, food tourism, gastronomy tourism, hospitality research and bibliometric analysis

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Introduction

Culinary tourism, an emerging field in the nexus of gastronomy and tourism, has garnered increasing scholarly attention in recent years. This interdisciplinary domain explores the intricate relationship between food, culture and tourism experiences, offering insights into how culinary traditions, gastronomic events, and dining experiences shape tourist perceptions, destination appeals and economic development (Kovalenko et al., 2023; Park & Widyanta, 2022; Testa et al., 2019; Wondirad et al., 2021). Drawing on a rich body of literature encompassing diverse themes and theoretical frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive retrospective overview of research in culinary tourism, identifying prominent themes, theories and future research directions through bibliometric analysis techniques.

One of the central themes in culinary tourism research is the assessment of service quality at gastronomic festivals and restaurants. Scholars have endeavoured to develop models that encapsulate dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and adequacy to understand how these factors influence tourist satisfaction and destination image (Kaushal & Yadav, 2021; Marek & Wiśniewska, 2021; Soonsan et al., 2023). Moreover, there is growing recognition of the role of local culinary offerings in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences. Studies have emphasised the significance of promoting local food and products, often registered with geographical indications, as a means of enhancing destination branding and attracting tourists seeking authentic gastronomic experiences (Anton Martin et al., 2021; Kanupriya, 2024; Matthew et al., 2022).

Wine tourism has emerged as another focal point of inquiry in the culinary tourism landscape. Scholars have explored the potential of wine tourism to stimulate demand in rural destinations and to contribute to regional development (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012; Duarte et al., 2022). Case studies, particularly in regions renowned for wine production such as the Demarcated Douro region in Portugal, have underscored the economic, cultural and environmental benefits of wine tourism initiatives (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2020; Ghosh & Das, 2017). Furthermore, the socio-cultural dimensions of culinary tourism have been extensively examined, with researchers investigating how tourists' backgrounds, values and preferences influence their food consumption behaviours and evaluations of destination food offerings (Kumar & Gupta, 2019; Wondirad et al., 2021). Studies have also explored the role of food in identity formation, place attachment and cultural exchange, highlighting its significance beyond mere sustenance.

Policy and governance issues have also been featured prominently in culinary tourism research. Scholars have analysed the role of government interventions, regulations and governance structures in supporting culinary tourism development, promoting sustainable practices and enhancing destination competitiveness (Matthew et al., 2018; Teixeira & Ribeiro, 2013). Furthermore, the impact of food festivals and gastronomic events on destination images has been explored, with researchers examining how local agents and social media platforms shape perceptions through food-related experiences. Additionally, emerging topics, such as the integration of technology into culinary businesses and the exploration of niche markets, have sparked interest among scholars, offering new avenues for research and innovation in the field of culinary tourism (Stone et al., 2022).

In this study, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual and conceptual structure of culinary tourism literature. To achieve this, we draw upon the conceptualisations of terms such as ‘Food Tourism’, ‘Culinary Tourism’, ‘Gastronomy’, ‘Tourist Destination’, ‘Tourism Development’ and ‘Hospitality’ from existing literature. These terms serve as the foundation for defining research themes in culinary tourism over the years, helping to delineate the boundaries and scope of our study.

Through a systematic review of existing studies on culinary tourism, we sought to address several key research questions. First, we aim to uncover the intellectual and conceptual structure of culinary research literature, shedding light on the foundational theories, methodologies and thematic trends that have shaped scholarly inquiry in this field. Second, we endeavoured to identify the theoretical perspectives that have been most commonly employed to study culinary tourism, examining how various theoretical frameworks have been applied to understand the complex interplay between food, culture and tourism experiences. Finally, we aim to outline promising future avenues for research in culinary tourism, leveraging insights from the existing literature to identify gaps, emerging trends and areas that need further exploration.

By systematically synthesising and analysing the existing body of research on culinary tourism, this study seeks to contribute to the advancement of theoretical and practical understanding in the field. By elucidating the intellectual landscape, theoretical underpinnings and future research directions in culinary tourism, we aim to provide scholars and practitioners with valuable insights to inform their work and drive innovation in this dynamic and multifaceted domain.

Research Themes Over the Year

Research on culinary tourism spans diverse themes, including destination branding, tourist motivations, sustainability, technological innovation, cultural preservation and policy frameworks. Scholars highlight how destination promotion, authentic experiences and technological advancements shape culinary tourism while emphasising economic growth, cultural preservation and visitor satisfaction.

Destination Development and Branding

Destination branding is crucial in attracting culinary tourists by promoting unique gastronomic offerings and cultural heritage (Inversini et al., 2024; Pérez Gálvez et al., 2020). Initiatives such as UNESCO-awarded tea traditions in East Frisia, Germany, enhance tourism by showcasing cultural authenticity. Collaboration between local stakeholders and educational institutions, such as private social dining concepts, has strengthened destination competitiveness and culinary tourism pathways (Sharma et al., 2020).

Tourist Motivations and Experiences

Understanding culinary tourists’ motivations and experiences is vital for destination management. Factors such as the quest for authenticity, perceived

value and gastronomic satisfaction influence tourist behaviour (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Villagómez-Buele et al., 2020). Sociocultural backgrounds shape food consumption behaviours and evaluations of destination cuisine (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019; Lin et al., 2023). Destination marketers must tailor offerings to diverse culinary preferences to enhance visitor engagement and loyalty.

Sustainability and Socio-economic Impacts

Sustainability is integral to culinary tourism's long-term viability. Studies underscore socio-economic factors, stakeholder collaboration and environmental stewardship as key to sustainable gastronomic tourism. For instance, Timor-Leste utilises food tourism for economic diversification and cultural promotion while ensuring environmental sustainability (Berno et al., 2022; Caldicott & Giang, 2022). Transitioning traditional rural livelihoods into culinary tourism, such as cheese tourism in rural areas, fosters rural development and livelihood diversification (Fusté-Forné & Mundet i Cerdan, 2021).

Technological Influence and Innovation

Technology significantly impacts culinary tourism by shaping consumer behaviour and business accessibility. Online platforms in North Sumatra, Indonesia, have facilitated easier access to traditional cuisine, transforming the culinary landscape (Hadromi & Murdani, 2019; Okumus et al., 2018). Innovations like virtual reality in food tourism promotion and social media engagement strategies enhance culinary tourism experiences (De Canio et al., 2022).

Cultural Preservation and Identity

Culinary tourism preserves and promotes cultural traditions and identities. Traditional culinary practices, regional food festivals and gastronomic heritage shape destination images and attract tourists (Okumus et al., 2018; Teixeira & Ribeiro, 2013). Studies in regions such as Córdoba, Spain and Cornwall, England, demonstrate how local cuisine influences tourist behaviour and regional identity (Busby et al., 2013; Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022). Emphasising authenticity in branding efforts differentiates destinations in a competitive tourism market.

Policy and Governance in Culinary Tourism Development

Government policies, regulations and governance structures shape culinary tourism development. Research highlights the role of government interventions in finance, marketing, infrastructure and human resource management in enhancing destination competitiveness (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2020; Guan et al., 2019). Studies explore financial incentives, destination marketing and food safety regulations (Ahlawat et al., 2019). Additionally, stakeholder collaboration, public-private partnerships and community engagement in culinary

tourism development are critical areas for sustainable policy interventions (Lee, Packer, & Scott, 2015). Understanding policy landscapes helps identify challenges and opportunities for sustainable culinary tourism growth.

Research Methodology

This study employs a contextual literature review methodology guided by Fraser and Fredline, 2021, and Rachao et al., 2020, to explore the multifaceted domain of culinary tourism. Utilising the PRISMA protocol, a systematic review process was executed in four steps: keyword database search for article identification, scholarly filtration for screening, manual screening and coding for eligibility, and snowball sampling for inclusion and analysis (Kumar et al., 2022, 2023). This rigorous methodology (see Figure 1) ensures the comprehensive coverage of relevant academic literature on culinary tourism, facilitates an in-depth analysis of its various dimensions, and contributes to the advancement of scholarly understanding in the field.

Step 1: Identification of Keywords and Database

The initial stage of the research entailed a comprehensive search within the Scopus database, using specific keywords encompassing the realms of culinary tourism

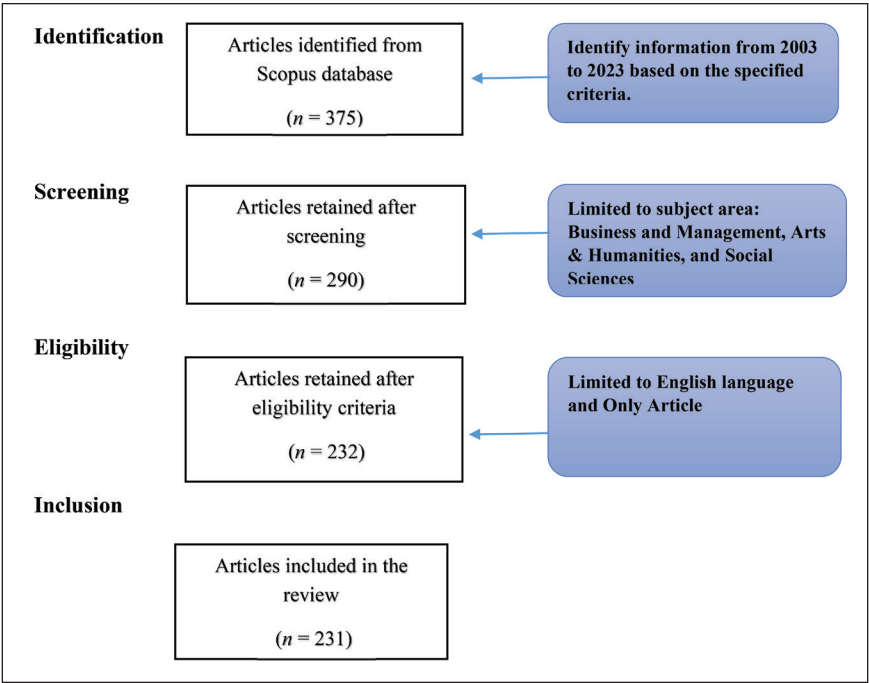


Figure 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Steps.

and destination development. The search parameters included terms such as 'Food Tourism', 'Culinary Tourism' and 'Gastronomy', in conjunction with phrases like 'Tourist Destination' and 'Tourism Development'. This meticulous process identified 375 relevant articles published between 2003 and 2023, meeting the predetermined criteria for inclusion in the study.

Step 2: Screening and Filtration

Second, we rigorously applied scholarly filtration protocols to refine the articles retrieved from our database. Initially, articles were filtered based on specific subject criteria, focusing on areas such as Business and Management, Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences. Following this stringent screening process, 290 articles were retained for further analysis, ensuring that only relevant scholarly works closely aligned with the research focus were included in the study.

Step 3: Eligibility and Inclusion

In the third step, we meticulously screened the articles, excluding those not in English or unrelated to the culinary tourism domain. Subsequently, we scrutinised the remaining 231 articles to ensure their relevance and alignment with our research objectives.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of the culinary tourism literature encompasses trends in year-wise publications, prominent journals, influential authors, bibliographic coupling and theoretical frameworks, providing insights into research dynamics and scholarly foundations.

Year-wise Publications

Figure 2 visually captures the dynamic evolution of culinary tourism research over time. The graph highlights a significant increase in publications in 2020, influenced by global events and heightened public interest, underscoring the impact of the field. The consistent rise in research output from 2014 to 2019 reflects continuous scholarly attention, while solitary publication in 2003 marks the modest inception and acknowledgement of culinary tourism. Exploration of factors such as global events and technology contributes to a better understanding of the research landscape. Delving into themes, regions, and collaborations offers a nuanced perspective on culinary tourism. In summary, the growth pattern and peak in 2020 (constituting 16.47% of the total) underscore the enduring significance of culinary tourism in academic inquiry, encouraging further exploration and ongoing scholarly engagement.



Figure 2. Year-wise Growth of Culinary Tourism Research.

Journals of Publication

Table 1 outlines the prominent journals in culinary tourism research, considering both document count and Citescore. ‘Sustainability Switzerland’ leads with 32 publications and a Citescore of 5.8. Notably, ‘Tourism Management’ stands out with a substantial Citescore of 22.9, despite a lower document count of 12. Journals like ‘Current Issues In Tourism’ and the ‘International Journal of Tourism Research’ share 11 documents but differ significantly in Citescores, indicating varying impact. The diverse range of Citescores for journals like ‘International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research’, ‘Anatolia’, ‘Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research’, ‘British Food Journal’ and ‘International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science’ underscores the nuanced landscape of culinary tourism scholarship. This information aids researchers in identifying influential outlets for their work based on both document count and impact metrics.

Authorship

Table 2 outlines the ten most cited studies in culinary tourism research, shedding light on impactful contributions. Topping the list is Everett and Aitchison’s (2008) study in the ‘Journal of Sustainable Tourism’ boasts 353 citations. Okumus et al. (2007) work in ‘Tourism Management’ and secure the second spot with 326 citations. Studies by Chang et al. (2010, 2011), published in the ‘Annals of Tourism Research’ and ‘Tourism Management’, respectively, claim third and sixth positions with 322 and 230 citations, respectively. Horng and Tsai’s (2010) contribution to ‘Tourism Management’ secures the fourth spot with 246 citations, while du Rand and Heath’s (2006) work in ‘Current Issues in Tourism’ occupies the fifth position with 232 citations. This ranking underscores the enduring influence of specific studies, providing researchers with insights into foundational works that have significantly shaped culinary tourism research.

Table 1. Most Productive Journals.

Source	Documents	Citescore
Sustainability Switzerland	32	5.8
Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites	16	3.2
Tourism Management	12	22.9
Current Issues in Tourism	11	13.7
International Journal of Tourism Research	11	7.6
International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research (Consumer Behaviour in Tourism and Hospitality)	8	5.3
Anatolia	7	4.3
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	6	6.8
British Food Journal	6	5.4
International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	6	4.5

Table 2. Ten Most Cited Studies.

Rank	Study	Journal	Citations
1	(Everett & Aitchison, 2008)	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	353
2	(Okumus et al., 2007)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	326
3	(Chang et al., 2010)	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	322
4	(Horng & Tsai, 2010)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	246
5	(du Rand & Heath, 2006)	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	232
6	(Chang et al., 2011)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	230
7	(Horng et al., 2012)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	215
8	(Kim et al., 2011)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	164
9	(Lee & Arcodia, 2011)	<i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i>	157
10	(Stone et al., 2017)	<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	149

Bibliographic Coupling

In our study, we utilised bibliographic coupling analysis to identify emerging themes and critical research areas within the culinary tourism literature. Bibliographic coupling is a similarity measure that uses citation analysis to establish connections between documents. Specifically, it identifies instances in which two studies reference a common third work in their bibliographies. This technique enables the identification of similar publications and themes, shedding light on niche areas and recent developments in the field.

Articles were selected as the unit of analysis through bibliographic coupling analysis conducted using VOSviewer, with a threshold set to at least 20 citations per article. This process resulted in the identification of five distinct clusters in 92 documents (see Figure 3), each of which is interconnected through nodes. These clusters represent thematic groupings within the literature, allowing for the recognition of evolving trends and providing insight into potential future research

directions. Overall, bibliographic coupling analysis serves as a valuable tool for uncovering thematic clusters and guiding future research in culinary tourism. By identifying areas of commonality and connectivity among scholarly works, this analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of research in this domain, ultimately contributing to the advancement of culinary tourism knowledge and scholarship.

Cluster 1: 'Gastronomy and Tourism Dynamics'

Academic research on culinary tourism highlights its growing importance in destination development and marketing. Governments and tourism providers increasingly target senior travellers due to their active participation in gastronomic experiences (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). However, limited studies explore the socio-demographics of older gastronomic tourists, revealing a gap in understanding their needs and preferences (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Gastronomic tourists exhibit diverse behaviours, with some seeking novel culinary experiences while others prefer familiar foods due to health or dietary concerns (Getz & Robinson, 2014; Guan et al., 2019). Additionally, gastronomy significantly influences destination image and visitor satisfaction, shaping tourists' revisit intentions and recommendations. The sustainability of rural tourism is increasingly linked to preserving local culinary traditions, reinforcing gastronomy's economic and cultural role in tourism (Getz & Robinson, 2014; Guan et al., 2019). Addressing these gaps can enhance destination management, marketing strategies and sustainable tourism development. By understanding the motivations and behaviours of gastronomic tourists, research can further contribute to advancing theory and practice in this evolving field.

Cluster 2: Culinary Tourism Dynamics

The cluster 2 research highlights its development, marketing strategies and role in destination branding. Studies emphasise the significance of various forms of knowledge—local, scientific, managerial and political—in shaping food tourism (Bertella, 2011; Boyne et al., 2003; Busby et al., 2013). Scientific and global managerial knowledge play a crucial role in gourmet food tourism, as seen in Lofoten, Norway, while local knowledge and governance drive more traditional food tourism experiences in regions like Maremma Toscana, Italy (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Gyimóthy, 2017; Horng & Tsai, 2010). Regional food festivals contribute to destination branding, cultural identity and sustainability (Horng & Tsai, 2010, 2012; Kim et al., 2010, 2011). Moreover, tourists' lifestyle preferences, such as those of Slow Food members, influence their engagement with food tourism experiences (Lai et al., 2020). The role of digital platforms, particularly government tourism websites, in promoting culinary tourism has been explored, revealing their importance in shaping perceptions of food destinations. However, gaps in cohesive marketing strategies remain (Kumar et al., 2023; Lee, Packer, & Scott, 2015; Okumus et al., 2007; Plummer et al., 2006; Şahin & Güzel, 2020; Stone et al., 2017). These insights underscore the need for strategic branding, digital engagement and experiential marketing in culinary tourism.

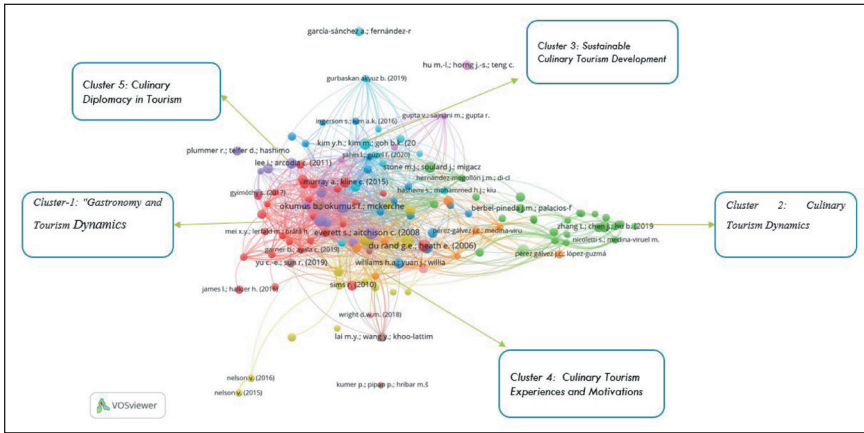


Figure 3. Major Thematic Cluster Identified Through Bibliographic Coupling.

Cluster 3: Sustainable Culinary Tourism Development

Cluster 3 explores sustainable culinary tourism, consumer behaviour, the Michelin-starred chefs’ role, and marketing strategies. A key contribution is a theoretical framework based on stakeholder and social practice theory (SCT) to understand sustainable culinary tourism development (Bertella, 2020; Broadway, 2017). Empirical research with restaurant operators identifies socio-economic and environmental issues like over-fishing and supply fluctuations, highlighting the importance of ethical conduct and proactive strategies (Duarte Alonso et al., 2018). Another focus is consumer behaviour, emphasising food involvement, gastronomic identity and travel motivations. Studies show that food enthusiasts exhibit distinct behaviours and preferences, underscoring the need for tailored destination marketing (Gordin et al., 2016; Hillel et al., 2013).

Michelin-starred chefs are identified as influencers of destination appeal through unique gastronomic experiences and the promotion of local products (James & Halkier, 2014). Longitudinal studies on Michelin-starred restaurants reveal strategies like the gastronomisation of rural areas to enhance destination attractiveness (Mei et al., 2017; Murray & Kline, 2015). Additionally, destination marketing strategies, such as Ireland’s ‘Place on a Plate’, highlight the role of local gastronomy in enhancing destination identity, though challenges in stakeholder collaboration and implementation remain (Nilsson et al., 2011; Okumus et al., 2018). Overall, the cluster offers insights into sustainable culinary tourism, providing a comprehensive understanding of its development and opportunities.

Cluster 4: Culinary Tourism Experiences and Motivations

Culinary tourism is an emerging field that explores tourists’ motivations, experiences and its impact on destination development. This cluster highlights the significance of gastronomic experiences in enhancing destination attractiveness

(Baah et al., 2020; Bertan, 2020; Bitsani & Kavoura, 2012). Studies investigate factors influencing international tourists' acceptance of local cuisine, the role of restaurants in gastronomic tourism, and motivations for attending wine festivals (Lee, Packer, & Scott, 2015; Luoh et al., 2020). Additionally, cultural background influences on ethnic restaurant experiences and sources of enjoyment in cooking learning tourism are explored (López-Guzmán et al., 2019).

Research in this cluster also examines drivers of destination competitiveness in culinary tourism, focusing on branding and the quality of culinary experiences in shaping tourist satisfaction and behaviour (Ingerson & Kim, 2016; Pérez Gálvez et al., 2017). The economic and social benefits of gastronomic events and festivals are emphasised, showcasing their role in local community development (Sohn & Yuan, 2013; Su et al., 2020). Overall, these studies provide valuable insights into culinary tourism's role in destination marketing, sustainable tourism development and enhancing tourist engagement through memorable gastronomic experiences.

Cluster 5: Culinary Diplomacy in Tourism

This cluster presents a diverse range of articles that focus on the intersection of food, tourism and diplomacy, particularly through the lens of culinary diplomacy or gastrodiploacy. These studies examined how nations strategically use their cuisine to influence perceptions and promote cultural diplomacy on a global scale (Leong et al., 2017). Research in this cluster contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of food and tourism in national branding and public diplomacy efforts (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010; Suntikul, 2019). By exploring the various ways in which food is used as a tool for diplomatic engagement, these studies shed light on the complex dynamics of gastrodiploacy in tourism (Nelson, 2015, 2016). Furthermore, these articles highlight the importance of integrated and holistic approaches to gastrodiploacy, emphasising the need to consider the entire 'foodescape' of a nation as a realm of diplomatic potential. Overall, this cluster underscores the significance of culinary diplomacy in shaping international relations and promoting cultural exchanges through tourism.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical perspectives in culinary tourism provide valuable frameworks for understanding tourist behaviour and destination development. From recreation specialisation to cultural experience theory, these perspectives offer insights into niche market targeting, destination image management and cultural immersion opportunities, enriching both academic research and practical strategies in the field.

Recreation Specialisation Theory.

This theory posits that individuals develop specialised interests in recreational activities such as culinary tourism based on their preferences and experiences. Understanding the levels of specialisation among tourists helps destination marketers tailor offerings to specific niche markets, thereby enhancing visitor

satisfaction and destination competitiveness (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012). By catering to diverse interests and preferences, destinations can differentiate themselves, attract a wider range of visitors, and contribute to the sustainable growth of culinary tourism.

Place Reputation

Theory. This theory focuses on how external audiences perceive a destination and the role of reputation management in shaping this perception. Managing a destination's reputation, particularly in terms of its culinary offerings, is crucial for attracting tourists. Highlighting unique food culture through media and promotions enhances a destination's image and appeal (Nelson, 2015). By leveraging positive perceptions, marketers can differentiate their destination, increase visitor arrivals and foster destination loyalty through positive word-of-mouth.

Attitude Theory

Attitude theory suggests that individuals' attitudes toward activities like gastronomy tourism significantly influence their behavioural intentions and decision-making processes. By examining tourists' attitudes towards culinary experiences, marketers gain insights into motivations and preferences, enabling targeted marketing strategies (Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015). Shaping positive attitudes through strategic messaging enhances a destination's appeal, competitiveness and overall tourism revenue.

Gastrodiplomacy Theory

Gastrodiplomacy employs cuisine as a strategic tool for shaping national perceptions and fostering cultural diplomacy. In tourism, it plays a key role in destination branding and international relations (Suntikul, 2019). By showcasing their culinary heritage and engaging visitors through food-related experiences, destinations enhance visibility, encourage cross-cultural understanding and strengthen diplomatic ties, ultimately benefiting their global image and tourism growth.

Cultural Experience Theory.

Cultural experience theory underscores the pivotal role of cultural immersion in augmenting tourist satisfaction and enriching tourists' experiences (Stone et al., 2022). In culinary tourism, food serves as a conduit for cultural engagement, allowing visitors to explore local traditions and customs. An academic exploration of this theory offers profound insights into how gastronomic experiences are intertwined with cultural authenticity, shaping both visitor perceptions and destination appeal.

Summary, Research Opportunities and Limitations

Summary and Contribution

This study presents a comprehensive overview of the development of culinary tourism research, examining its evolution over the years and identifying key trends,

influential journals, authorship patterns and theoretical perspectives. Through visual representations and quantitative analyses, this study highlights the growing scholarly interest in culinary tourism, with a significant increase in publications observed in 2020. This surge in research output reflects the field's enduring significance and its impact on academic inquiry, spurred by global events and heightened public interest. Moreover, the study delves into thematic clusters within culinary tourism research, offering insights into diverse areas, such as gastronomy and tourism dynamics, culinary tourism dynamics, sustainable culinary tourism development, culinary tourism experiences and motivations and culinary diplomacy in tourism. Each thematic cluster explored critical topics, research gaps and theoretical frameworks, contributing to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of culinary tourism and its implications for destination management, marketing and sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, the identification of research questions within each thematic cluster provides a roadmap for future research endeavours, guiding scholars in addressing key gaps and advancing knowledge in culinary tourism. From understanding the socio-demographic characteristics and preferences of gastronomic tourists to exploring the role of culinary experiences in destination branding and diplomacy, the research questions offer valuable directions for scholarly inquiry and practical interventions in the field. In summary, this study makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse on culinary tourism by synthesising the existing research, identifying emerging trends and outlining future research directions. By providing a comprehensive overview of the field's development, thematic clusters and research questions, this study offers valuable insights to researchers, practitioners and policymakers involved in culinary tourism development and management.

Practical Implications

A comprehensive analysis of culinary tourism research has several practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism industry. First, destination managers should capitalise on the increasing interest in culinary tourism by diversifying their gastronomic offerings and tailoring experiences to cater to different market segments, including seniors, food enthusiasts and cultural explorers. This necessitates collaboration with local stakeholders such as chefs, producers and festival organisers to curate authentic and immersive culinary experiences that align with destination branding efforts. In addition, destination marketers can leverage digital platforms to promote destination-specific gastronomic content and engage with prospective visitors, thereby enhancing destination visibility and attracting culinary tourists. Furthermore, policymakers should prioritise sustainable culinary tourism development by implementing regulations that support environmental stewardship, cultural preservation and socioeconomic benefits for local communities. This entails fostering partnerships between government agencies, businesses and community organisations to ensure responsible tourism practices and the equitable distribution of economic gains. Overall, these practical implications underscore the importance of strategic planning, collaboration and sustainability for harnessing the potential of culinary tourism for destination development and competitiveness.

Interwoven Relationships Between the Thematic Clusters

The interwoven relationships between thematic clusters in culinary tourism research underscore the multidimensional nature of this field and its interconnectedness. Cluster 1, which focuses on gastronomy and tourism dynamics, lays the foundation for highlighting the significance of gastronomy in destination development and visitor satisfaction. This sets the stage for Cluster 2, which explores culinary tourism dynamics, including knowledge exchange and destination branding, building upon the understanding of the gastronomic importance established in Cluster 1. Cluster 3 delves deeper into sustainable culinary tourism development, bridging the gap between gastronomic significance and practical implementation by addressing socioeconomic and environmental issues. Meanwhile, Cluster 4 examines culinary tourism experiences and motivations, providing insights into tourist behaviour and destination competitiveness, thereby enriching the discussions initiated in Clusters 1–3. Finally, Cluster 5 explored culinary diplomacy in tourism, linking gastronomic experiences with cultural diplomacy efforts on a global scale, thus demonstrating the intricate connections between culinary tourism, diplomacy and international relations.

Cross-fertilisation of Theoretical Perspectives

The cross-fertilisation of theoretical perspectives in culinary tourism research offers a nuanced understanding of tourist behaviour and destination development. By integrating Recreation Specialisation Theory with Attitude Theory, researchers can discern how specialised interests influence tourists' attitudes towards culinary experiences, thereby informing targeted marketing strategies tailored to niche markets. Furthermore, the fusion of Place Reputation Theory with Gastrodiploamacy Theory illuminates how destination image management intersects diplomatic efforts, emphasising the strategic leveraging of culinary heritage to enhance a destination's global reputation and diplomatic standing. Cultural Experience Theory, when integrated with Place Reputation Theory, underscores the significance of authentic cultural immersion in shaping destination perceptions, suggesting that effective reputation management should prioritise highlighting a destination's culinary authenticity to foster memorable cultural experiences for tourists. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates a comprehensive framework for destination marketers and policymakers to craft holistic strategies that capitalise on culinary tourism's potential for sustainable growth and international engagement.

Limitations and Future Research Directions on Thematic Cluster

The study's limitations include reliance on the Scopus database for data extraction and potentially overlooking non-indexed journals. Future research could mitigate this limitation by accessing additional databases, such as WOS, EBSCO, Google Scholar and ProQuest for a more comprehensive review. Second, the exclusion of books, edited book chapters, and conference proceedings may have led to the omission of valuable insights. Subsequent scholars could incorporate these sources to enhance culinary tourism research. Finally, the study's focus on specific areas such as business, management, social science and art humanists within culinary

tourism contexts may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future scholars should explore other relevant fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, or interdisciplinary studies to provide a broader perspective on culinary tourism. Table 3 provides potential future research directions in the culinary tourism research area

Table 3. Potential Future Research Direction.

Thematic Clusters	Research Questions
Gastronomy and culinary tourism dynamics	1. How do socio-demographic characteristics and motivations of gastronomic tourists vary across market segments? 2. What role do regional food festivals and local gastronomy play in destination branding and visitor satisfaction? 3. How can digital platforms and marketing strategies enhance tourists' culinary experiences and destination choices? 4. What are the economic, cultural and sustainability implications of promoting local culinary traditions?
Culinary tourism development	1. How does knowledge exchange between local and scientific food practices influence food tourism development? 2. What are the strengths and shortcomings of digital platforms in promoting culinary tourism destinations? 3. How can cohesive marketing strategies be developed to enhance culinary tourism experiences?
Sustainable culinary tourism	1. What socio-economic and environmental challenges impact sustainable culinary tourism, and how can they be mitigated? 2. How does food involvement influence consumer behaviour and sustainable destination marketing? 3. How can Michelin-starred chefs and other stakeholders contribute to local gastronomic sustainability?
Culinary tourism experiences and motivations	1. What factors influence tourists' acceptance of local cuisine, and how do cultural backgrounds shape perceptions? 2. How do culinary experiences impact tourist satisfaction, behavioural intentions and sustainable development? 3. How do food festivals, restaurants and local gastronomy contribute to destination competitiveness?
Culinary diplomacy in tourism	1. How do nations leverage cuisine for cultural diplomacy and international tourism branding? 2. What are the opportunities and challenges in implementing culinary diplomacy initiatives? 3. How do perceptions of a nation's culinary identity impact its tourism appeal and visitor preferences?

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