

## RESIDENTS PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF LOCAL CUISINE AS A TOURISM PRODUCT IN DESTINATION MARKETING

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### Abstract

*The main purpose of the study was to find out the role of local cuisine as a marketing tool in tourism destination promotion. It also aimed to find out the possible marketing strategies to include local cuisine in destination promotion. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 500 respondents residing in Karnataka, India. The independent t-test was used to find out the promotional strategies and marketing tools which can influence resident's decision to travel. The study found out that promotion of specialty restaurant and eating places, launching of regional food festival and export of local food products can be the possible marketing strategies to enhance the destination image. The results of this study offer practical suggestions to destination and the tourism suppliers looking to develop positioning and marketing strategies for Karnataka Tourism. The study throws the light on how local cuisine can be used as marketing tool to promote or enhances the tourist destination image. If used properly, the local cuisine could become the effective marketing tool.*

**Keywords:** *Culinary Tourism, Destination Image, Food Tourism, Food Festival, Marketing Strategies*

### Introduction

The travel and tourism world are witnessing the prominent shift with respect to the travel motivation and tourist behaviour. The tourists are engaging themselves into shorter but frequent travel rather than longer and rare one. To keep up with trends, destinations are developing themselves to satisfy this new preference of the tourists. Culinary tourism or food tourism is the

emerging form of tourism which can be understood as the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences. By combining travel with these edible experiences, food tourism offers both locals and tourists alike an authentic taste of place in any tourist destination. In connection with this, food and beverage, whether local or international, can be considered as an essential feature of local tourism advertisement for a destination. Food & beverage is an enormous industry which not only gets the attention from the media but also from the researchers and destination managers. There are magazines, lifestyle channels on television, internet platforms, social media segments which solely focus on the local food and beverages of any destination. This gradual shift of way of living and indulging into certain food and beverage products and services has become a status symbol. The destinations have also taken up the task to encourage such lifestyle and are trying to identify the significance of the local food and beverage with respect to their quality, originality, representation and experience.

Tourists' experience can become impressive and memorable with the food consumption activities at any destination. Further, it acts as one of major motivators for the tourists to travel a destination (Quan & Wang, 2004). The tourists discover culinary experience when they try different cuisine during their travel to a destination. In this way cuisine becomes an imperative factor in choice of destination for a potential tourist (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). In a study completed by Kivela and Crofts (2006) showed that the tourists perceive Hong Kong as a gastronomy destination. Moreover, the revisit intentions of the tourists primarily dependent on its gastronomy which is pivotal in building an exemplary overall experience for a tourist.

Lately, the destination marketing organisations are using food as an element of culture into the tourism management strategies to bring socio-economic, environmental benefits to the industry as well as the tourists. To develop the competitive edge, marketers are trying to harness the ability of cuisine to bring out the uniqueness of the destination (Du Rand et al., 2003; Okumus, Kock, Scantlebury & Okumus, 2013). The competitive advantage of food in tourism cannot be easily replicated owing to the distinctiveness to a location and culture (Mulcahy, 2015). Moreover, the tourism planner and entrepreneur are trying to work hand in hand to tap the potential of local food and beverages hold to enhance sustainability in tourism. Using local food and beverage in the tourism plan also contributes to the authenticity of the destination, strengthening of local economy, and creation of environmentally friendly infrastructure. But then again, the local cuisine was not hold high regards by the local people and often viewed as not being sophisticated enough and not something a tourist wants. However, all indications are that this

attitude is changing and is in accordance with the market trend where tourists want to experience and “taste” the region they are visiting, an underlying reason being that culture is playing an increasingly important role in tourism and food is one of the key elements of culture.

The study aims to study local food as Tourism Marketing Tool for Karnataka Tourism. Moreover, it tries to find out the marketing tools which can influence the tourist’s decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages. The study also attempts to assess possible marketing strategies that can contribute to optimizing a destination’s potential to promote cuisine tourism

## **Gastronomy Tourism**

As defined by Committee on Tourism Competitiveness (CTC) in UNWTO, “Gastronomy tourism is a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. Along with authentic, traditional and/or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomy tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes.” Further, the local food and beverages are main motivating factors and thus the sole decision-making ground behind the trips taken to gastronomic tourism destination.

Gastronomy tourism, lately, is witnessing the interest of the tourists largely due to the emergence of the niche food programs, and surge in social media usage. There are celebrities and experts who highlight the history, cultural significance or relevance or different styles of cooking of the food through TV channels, social media pages, events or magazines. Furthermore, people have initiated visiting to a vacation spot particularly to enjoy the local cuisines and experience the meals which they have seen prepared through the celebrity chefs (Cambourne & Macionis, 2003). One can say that now days eating has turned out to be more of a social event in preference to just a physiological want because of those activities.

There are some countries which are famous for their native cuisines as Pasta from Italy, Cheese from France, chocolates from Belgium and Switzerland. Previous studies have shown that one of the primary reasons for tourists to opt these destinations is to experience the local cuisines (Sevil & Yüncü, 2009). The tourists make use of these novice and wholesome experiences to explore and appreciate the desired regions or area. Moreover, they also play an important role in recommending the experience to other

potential tourists. It is worth noting that the experiences travelers have via local cuisines also indicate that emotions and reminiscences are involved, and this makes that vacation very special and appealing as these emotions and memories are very personal (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Further, while indulging in the local food & beverages, the tourists directly or indirectly get indulged in the local culture and heritage too.

## **Gastronomy Tourism and its Connection to Destination Marketing**

Though the probability of sustainable tourism, reinforcement of regional economy and eco-friendly infrastructure increases with the preferment of regional cuisines still they are not showcased enough in the promotional materials and communication tools used for tourism marketing. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the destination marketers to examine the current and futuristic food and beverage trends which will enable them to use the potential of their local cuisines for marketing the region effectively. The world is witnessing a paradigm shift of food as the essential support to tourism to a reason to visit new destination. With the new age development, destinations are using food as one of the brand elements or to revamp the image of a destination. The world is witnessing a paradigm shift of food as the essential element of tourism support to a reason for experiencing a new destination. A destination can be experience from the local cuisine as it provides various branding elements viz. products, practices, art and customs of preparing and eating, sensory elements, origins of food, and food preparation (Richards, 2015).

This aspect results in next important task, displaying and promoting culinary tourism within the right thanks to attract the maximum amount potential tourists as possible. If the destination decides on the way to display and promote culinary tourism it can then be increasingly used as a branding instrument for the destination (Du Rand et al., 2003). For countries who do not have well developed food tourism strategy it is important to find out from success stories from other countries and use benchmarking to compete on the global market (Du Rand et al., 2003)

Destination marketing consists of multiple elements and local cuisine has emerged as an fundamental component of it (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Long, 2004). Frochot (2003) discussed the topic of destinations using food and beverages to put them during a unique marketing position to draw. Food tourism is a part of cultural distinctiveness of a destination, which reassures a destination's positioning strategy in the competitive market. Therefore,

destinations save themselves of being replaced and overtaken by competitors. Uniqueness can also be depicted through symbols or ambience, which is unique for the destination. In addition, Deneault (2002) stressed that rather than one cuisine, marketers can publicize range of available products in a region.

Moreover, Long (2004) considered cuisine as the 'pull' factor of the 'push and pull' concept of tourist motivations developed by Dann (1977). The internal forces which drive the desires of a person to travel from socio-psychological motives are the 'Push Factors'. Whereas the external forces which affect a person's travel decision making are called as 'Pull Factors'. Lew (1987) discussed these external forces as the attractions in the destinations which tourists look for and visit during their travel. Attractions are composed of various attributes which are designed and managed in a way that motivate tourists to observe, participate and to experience. Therefore, the local cuisine can be considered as a 'pull factor' to motivate tourist to visit certain destination.

Hashimoto and Telfer (2003) reported that more research and effort needs to be made to attract more domestic tourists to culinary attractions. There are several implications of using food tourism in destination marketing and therefore, the contribution of local cuisine cannot be neglected in marketing a destination. If properly developed and implemented, the experience of regional and local food can add value to the destination competitiveness (Quan & Wang, 2004). Furthermore, it is essential to elaborate strategies to promote brand loyalty to the local visitors and by doing so gaining repeating customers. As Hashimoto and Telfer (2003) confirmed, collecting marketing information as well as information about the consumer behaviour and establishing loyal customers is a crucial task of wine and food outlets.

Through branding destinations can develop awareness of the destination, create a positive image of the destination, and increase the marketing of the destination in the consumer market. To brand a product successfully it is essential to improve the brand awareness and to develop strong brand recognition in the mind of the consumers which includes the name of the brand, logo, symbols, slogan, and packaging (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006). Further, branding of food can be utilised to experience the culture, its identity, status, and communication (Frochot, 2003).

## **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted in Karnataka, India. The residents of Karnataka were the respondents for the study. The close ended, structure questionnaire

was used to record the data from the respondents. The questionnaire divided into three parts. The first recorded the demographic and travel pattern data. The second part had the question related to the food and beverages as marketing tools. The third part of the questionnaire asked the question related to the possible marketing strategies to improve destination image. The answers were recorded in Likert scale ranging from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree. The research study used primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through structured questionnaire and secondary data was collected through various sources as newspapers, journals, magazines etc. The data was collected to through close ended, structured questionnaire. The convenient sampling method was used to collect the data from the sample.

## Data Interpretation

**Table 1: Demographic and Travel Pattern Data**

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	301	55.3
	Female	199	36.6
	Total	500	100
<b>Frequency of travel</b>			
	Never	5	1
	Once in a year	65	13
	Twice in a year	170	34
	Frequently	260	52
	Total	500	100
<b>Key components of food tourism</b>			
	Specialty Restaurant & Eating places	175	35
	Locally & Regionally produced food products	175	35
	Special cuisines	80	16
	Special Food Events	45	9
	Others	25	5
	Total	500	100
<b>Do you try local cuisine during your holidays</b>			
	Yes	474	79
	No	26	21
	Total	500	100

		Frequency	Percent
Do you buy food or beverages as a souvenir (gift) while on your holidays			
Yes		275	55
No		225	45
Total		500	100
Do the food and beverages at a destination influence your decision to travel			
Yes		350	70
No		150	30
Total		500	100
Will you travel to a destination only to experience certain food or beverages?			
Yes		299	56.8
No		201	38.2
Total		500	100
Are you familiar with the term “culinary tourism” or traveling for the purpose of Enjoying food and beverages?			
Yes		308	58.6
No		192	36.5
Total		500	100

As shown in Table 1, 500 valid responses were taken from 55.3% males and 36.6% females. Moreover, 52% of the respondents registered that they travel frequently in a year, 34% travel twice a year and only 5% registered for no travelling at all. Further, 35% of the respondents identified Speciality restaurant & eating places and locally produced food products as the key components of food tourism.

**Table 2: Local Food as Tourism Marketing tool for Karnataka Tourism**

	Item	Mean Value
1	Cuisine can be included in marketing tools/brochures/pamphlets	3.69
2	Local cuisine is the key element of the images/brand identity	3.58
3	Organization of food festival will improve the destination image	3.93
4	Package food together with the other key attraction in the destination	4.46
5	Local food can be a factor in developing local culture and traditional experiences for tourism	4.18

From the Table 2, it can be inferred that the majority of residents agreed that the cuisine can be included in marketing tools/brochures/pamphlets and

organisation of food festivals will improve the destination image. However, the respondents were neutral regarding the local cuisine as the key element of the brand identity. Further, they strongly believed that packaging food together with the other key attraction in Karnataka can be used as marketing tool by Karnataka Tourism Department. Moreover, they were optimistic that local cuisine can be used an important factor in developing local culture and traditional experiences, thereby adding to experiential tourism marketing.

**Table 3: Possible Marketing Strategies to Optimize a Destination's Tourism Potential**

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean Value</b>
1	Media coverage of all local/regional	3.96
2	Promotion of specialty restaurant/eating places	4.06
3	Developing of local/regional food as a special tourist attraction of the destination	4.04
4	Branding/marketing of locally produced product	3.68
5	Launching regional food festival	4.02
6	Exporting local food products	3.56
7	Developing of special food/ wine tourist route	3.68
8	Organizing special food events	4.0

Table 3 depicts the mean value for the possible strategies that can contribute to optimize a Karnataka's tourism potential. The data reveals that the respondentss were in slight agreement that strategies viz. developing special food/wine tourist route, exporting local food products, and branding locally produced products can contribute to enhance Karnataka's tourism potential. However, they strongly supported the strategies viz. promoting specialty restaurant, developing local food as tourist attraction, launching regional food festivals, and organizing special food events periodically.

## Hypothesis Testing

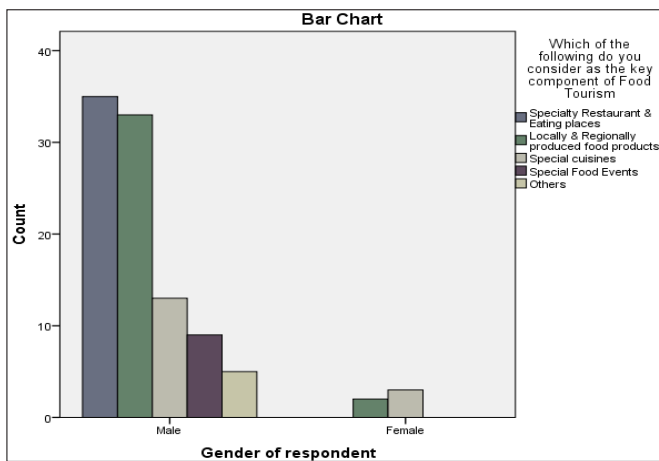
### *Set 1:*

H0: The perception of the residents towards the key component of food tourism does not vary with gender.

H1: The perception of the residents towards the key component of food tourism varies with gender.

**Table 4: Chi Square Test of Perception of the Residents towards the Key Component of Food Tourism does not vary with Gender)**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.985 <sup>a</sup>	4	.061
Likelihood Ratio	8.928	4	.063
Linear-by-Linear Association	.848	1	.357
N of Valid Cases	500		



**Fig. 1: Gender Response towards Key Component of Food Tourism**

At 10% significance level, it can be found that significance value (p-value) for the chi-square test is 0.061 (p-value<0.1). It indicates that the perception of the residents towards the key component of food tourism varies with gender. And from the Fig. 1, it can be deduced that very small percentage of female residents prefer special cuisines and locally and regionally produced food products and they do not seem to be much inclined towards food tourism. However, males seem to be highly inclined towards food tourism and majority of the males prefer specialty restaurants and eating places the most, followed by locally and regionally produced food products followed by special cuisines and special food events.

### Set 2:

H0: There is no significant association between the marketing tools to improve destination image and the residents' decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages.

H1: There is significant association between the marketing tools to improve destination image and the residents' decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages.

**Table 5: Independent Sample Test of Marketing Tools and Residents' Decision to Travel**

		Independent Samples Test					
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Cuisine can be included in marketing tools/ brochures/ pamphlets	Equal variances assumed	.344	.559	-.655	98	.514	-.137
	Equal variances not assumed			-.668	77.03	.506	-.137
Local cuisine is the key element of the image/ brand identity	Equal variances assumed	.015	.904	.444	98	.658	.082
	Equal variances not assumed			.445	73.10	.658	.082
Organization of food festival will improve the destination image	Equal variances assumed	.677	.413	.108	98	.014	.021
	Equal variances not assumed			.103	63.38	.018	.021
Package food together with the other key attractions in the destination	Equal variances assumed	.530	.468	2.70	98	.008	.545
	Equal variances not assumed			2.68	71.66	.009	.545

Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Local food can be a factor in developing local culture and traditional experience for tourism	Equal variances assumed	.043	.836	1.45	98	.150	.281
	Equal variances not assumed			1.37	62.09	.174	.281

From the above Independent sample T-test table, it can be seen that at 5% significance level, there are only two marketing tools which can influence the residents' decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages as the p-value for that one marketing tool is less than 0.05. The possible marketing tools to improve destination image and the residents' decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages are:

- Organization of food festival will improve the destination image.
- Package food together with the other key attractions in the destination.

Therefore, from the above table, it is found that there is a significant association between the marketing tools which can influence the residents' decision to travel only to experience a certain food or beverages. Hence  $H_0$  is rejected.

### **Set 3:**

$H_0$ : There is no significant association between the possible marketing strategies that can contribute to optimizing a destination's potential and local cuisine influencing the residents' decision to travel to a certain place.

$H_1$ : There is a significant association between the possible marketing strategies that can contribute to optimizing a destination's potential and local cuisine influencing the residents' decision to travel to a certain place.

**Table 6: Independent Sample test between Possible Marketing Strategies and Residents' Decision to Travel**

		Independent Samples Test				t-test for Equality of Means			
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference		
Media coverage of all local and regional food	Equal variances assumed	.990	.322	.583	98	.561	.067		
	Equal variances not assumed			.596	57.731	.553	.067		
Promotion of specialty restaurant/eating places	Equal variances assumed	7.494	.007	2.210	98	.029	.281		
	Equal variances not assumed			1.952	42.812	.047	.281		
Development of local/ regional food as a special tourist attraction of the destination	Equal variances assumed	.077	.782	1.657	98	.101	.219		
	Equal variances not assumed			1.643	53.873	.106	.219		
Branding & Marketing of locally produced products	Equal variances assumed	.775	.381	-.279	98	.781	-.038		
	Equal variances not assumed			-.268	50.472	.790	-.038		
Launching regional food festival	Equal variances assumed	5.303	.023	2.366	98	.020	.300		
	Equal variances not assumed			2.104	43.340	.041	.300		
Exporting local food products	Equal variances assumed	.196	.659	-1.945	98	.045	-.295		
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.968	56.422	.044	-.295		
Development of special food/ wine tourist route	Equal variances assumed	2.452	.121	-1.068	98	.288	-.133		
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.012	48.933	.316	-.133		
Organizing special food events	Equal variances assumed	5.717	.019	1.712	98	.035	-.238		
	Equal variances not assumed			1.539	44.160	.031	-.238		

From the above Independent sample T-test table, it can be seen that at 5% significance level, there are four possible strategies that can influence the resident's decision to travel to a certain place as the p-value for these four strategies are less than 0.05. The possible strategies that can influence residents' decision to travel to a certain place for food and beverages are:

- Promotion of Specialty restaurant and eating places.
- Launching regional food festival.
- Exporting local food products.
- Organizing special food events.

Therefore, from the above table, it is found that there is a significant association between the possible strategies that can contribute to optimizing a destination's potential and food and beverages influencing the residents' decision to travel to a certain place. Hence  $H_0$  is rejected.

## **Managerial Implications**

Gastronomy tourism or culinary tourism has become one of the trends which the destinations are using to promote their cultural and traditional tourism products. Indian cuisine is considered as the pivotal part of its rich and vibrant culture. It offers the enormous variety and palatable combination of food items to the residents to experience the diversity in the local cuisine. Though, to promote India as a gastronomy tourism destination is still a challenge in front of the destination marketers. This study offers few managerial implications which could help the destination marketers to understand the use of tourism marketing tools to position the destination as gastronomy tourism destination. Karnataka, India itself offers the huge diversity of cuisine, all depending upon the local culture, geography, and demography.

The destination marketers could tap the gastronomical potential of Karnataka to attract the domestic and international residents. As of now, Karnataka is majorly famous of MICE tourism or religious tourism and therefore, if thought strategically, it could become one of the biggest gastronomical experience offering destination. As per the study, the marketers may start organising the food festivals with the blend of local culture to improve the destination image. Also, they can administer the local

cuisine or authentic places for local cuisine in the tour packages as their marketing tools.

## Conclusion

As per the survey, the key component of food tourism included specialty restaurants, eating places and locally and regionally produce food products. However, a small percentage of residents believed that special cuisine, and special food event are also key components of food tourism. The research found out that the majority of the respondents try local food and beverages on their holidays. The majority of respondents buy local food and beverages while on their holidays. The study revealed that food and beverages at tourist destination influence the decision of the residents' visit and revisit the same destination. As per the survey, the majority of respondents would like to travel only to experience the local cuisine. The study found out that the information of local cuisine could be included in brochure and pamphlets as marketing tool for creating a positive destination image. The study revealed that organisation of food festival can improve destination image to great extent. It is found that the Karnataka local cuisine can be used as a marketing tool to enhance the destination image. It is also found that there is a significant association between the possible strategies that can contribute to optimizing a destination's potential and food and beverages influencing the residents' decision to travel to a certain place. Male respondents seem to be highly inclined towards food tourism and majority of them prefer specialty restaurants and eating places the most, followed by locally and regionally produced food products followed by special cuisines and special food events. The study revealed that promotion of specialty restaurant and eating places, launching of regional food festival and export of local food products can be the possible marketing strategies to enhance the destination's touristic image.

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