

## Utilizing Local Food Heritage as a Destination Marketing Strategy for Tourism to Promote Multiethnic Malaysia

Siti Nor Fadillah Ahmad Shariff<sup>1</sup>, \*Mohd Hairi Jalis<sup>2</sup>, Massyittah Omar<sup>3</sup>, Zuratulraha Jaafar<sup>3</sup>,  
Hawaliana Selamat<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management, Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government (GSGSG), Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu Kampus Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Taylor's Culinary Institute (TCI) and School of Hospitality, Tourism and Events Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Lakeside Campus, Malaysia

\*mohdhairijalis@uitm.edu.my

Corresponding Author: Mohd Hairi Jalis

**Abstract:** In the past 25 years, many tourism researchers have studied how local food, tourists, and travel locations are interrelated. While many studies have examined the impact of local food and dining experiences on tourists' travel decisions and length of stay, less attention has been given to how local food heritage is strategically incorporated into tourism destination marketing. Understanding this aspect is crucial, as it highlights the distinctive appeal of a destination and its contribution to community development. This article examines how the Malaysian government incorporates local food heritage into its country's marketing strategies. In this study, relevant archival documents, including tourism-related policies and marketing collaterals, were collected and analysed using thematic analysis. The results show that tourism and food-related policies play critical roles in the effort to strategize on 'what and how' to promote local food heritage as a key part of Malaysia's unique experience. The marketing collaterals, on the other hand, act as a 'middle person' which informs potential tourists about the local food heritage experiences, including the food's historical background and dining places either in descriptive (textual) or image (visual through specific food photographs). Although the results reveal both the specific and interrelated functions of tourism-related policies and marketing strategies, a few archival documents were excluded due to confidentiality issues and limited access. Therefore, future research might empirically delve deeper into the various tourism stakeholders' collaboration on the complexities of incorporating local food heritage into destination marketing strategies to provide comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge.

**Keywords:** *Culinary heritage; Government; Tourism marketing; Local food; Destination*

---

### 1. Introduction

Promoting the local culinary and its heritage values are becoming more widely recognised as an essential tourism experience for many destinations and as a way to improve their identity (Hsu & Scott, 2020; Jalis et al., 2024). As tourists increasingly seek authentic and distinctive culinary experiences, local food heritage has become a central aspect of the tourism experience, reflecting the culture and identity of a destination (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024; Stalmirska, 2021). It serves as a defining element of a destination's cultural identity and plays a crucial role in attracting and engaging tourists. Additionally, gastronomic tourism has gained significant attention in discussions on food heritage, highlighting its relevance to tourism development (Jalis et al., 2024; Lee, 2022).

Food heritage extends beyond the cuisine and beverages associated with a particular region or community, encompassing the broader socio-cultural significance of local culinary traditions. Recognising its potential to enhance tourism, many destinations have incorporated food heritage into their marketing strategies, leveraging locally produced goods and culinary traditions to strengthen their appeal.

Kiráľová and Malec (2021) stated that a growing interest and demand for local food from tourist destinations is looming. Tourism thrives when tourists can immerse themselves in a destination's history through its local food. As a result, destination marketing strategies should take into account the importance of utilising the "story of food" by relating local cuisine to cultural and historical settings. Su and Horng (2012) suggested that removing barriers to consuming local cuisine is crucial in the development of numerous destination marketing

initiatives. Furthermore, they argued that providing consistent and authentic images of local foods and culinary experiences is critical for marketing success.

Numerous studies have explored the extent to which local cuisine influences tourists' decisions to visit particular destinations. At first glance, the theories and concepts developed in these studies may appear universally applicable to all tourists. However, a considerable proportion of this research is grounded in the perspectives and study contexts of Western scholars. Some studies (e.g., Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Lin et al., 2011; Okumus et al., 2013; Okumus et al., 2018; Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024; Ryu & Jang, 2006) fail to distinguish between 'food heritage' and 'culinary heritage' within the framework of gastronomy terminology. This lack of distinction can be particularly problematic in studies focusing on specific tourism destinations.

Capitalising on the growing tourist demand for culinary experiences, along with its potential to enhance tourism and strengthen national identity, the Malaysian government has actively promoted local cuisine as a hallmark of the country's tourism industry. During the 1990 'Visit Malaysia Year' (VMY), local cuisine was prominently featured as a key attraction to position Malaysia as a leading international destination (Jalis, 2016). The diverse range of foods and culinary traditions reflects the ethnic and cultural richness of Malaysian society, shaped by historical interactions between local communities and early settlers. This cultural fusion has played a pivotal role in the evolution of Malaysia's local food heritage. Consequently, Malaysia's heterogeneous identity provides a strong foundation for defining and characterising its culinary heritage.

Given that ethnicity and cultural variety have significantly influenced the evolution of Malaysian cuisine, the political dynamics rooted in ethnicity and religion must be acknowledged to comprehend the food's impact on destination marketing and identity. In recent years, as the tourism industry continues to thrive and significantly bolster the domestic economy, the Malaysian government has developed marketing strategies that highlight the distinctive culinary experiences throughout Malaysia (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Jalis et al. 2014; Jalis et al., 2024). Local food heritage is intricately intertwined with the nation's various ethnic and cultural heritage, showcasing distinctive tastes, preparation techniques, and culinary traditions that have been transmitted through centuries.

Despite tourists' positive reception of Malaysian cuisine, subsequent studies (Jalis et al., 2024; Henderson, 2016; Olmedo, 2015; Shariff et al., 2024; Yoshino, 2010) have questioned its effectiveness in representing the nation's identity and cultural narrative. As a result, the effectiveness of the Malaysian government's efforts to integrate local cuisine into destination marketing remains a subject of debate. Therefore, using relevant tourism-related policies and local food heritage marketing collateral, this article investigates how the Malaysian government, together with its tourism collaborators, utilise the country's local food heritage in its marketing strategies.

## 2. Literature Review

**The Influence of Local Food Heritage in Tourism:** As previously discussed, the role of local food and its culinary specialities in the expansion of the tourism sector has been increasingly examined to better understand the interplay between local cuisine, tourists, and travel destinations. Recognising food tourism as a specialised segment within the broader tourism industry, the 2012 UNWTO Global Report on Food Tourism highlights the various benefits associated with this expanding market (UNWTO, 2012). Furthermore, the report found that 88.2% of its affiliated members—comprising public and commercial organisations collaborating with the UNWTO—acknowledged local food and culinary specialities as effective marketing tools for tourist destinations.

In recent years, destination culinary specialities, including local food and its heritage values, have gained significant scholarly attention within the realm of food tourism, reflecting their growing importance in tourism research. In tourism studies, the local cuisine of specific tourist destinations received limited attention before the 2000s, largely due to the interdisciplinary nature of food research (Hall & Gössling, 2016). Food-related studies span multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, economics, consumer behaviour, marketing, and hospitality. Within the broader concept of culinary tourism, local food heritage has emerged as a distinct niche market. Novelli (2005) noted that an increasing number of tourism destinations have adopted

it as a strategic tool for marketing and branding to establish and reinforce their identity.

Local food heritage encompasses a range of sociocultural elements that have influenced its development and distinctiveness. This evolution has given rise to a diverse selection of agricultural and food products, traditional dishes, local ingredients, preparation techniques, culinary tools, and consumption practices, all of which are accessible within the tourist market (Bessière & Tibère, 2013). Serving as a powerful symbol of regional identity, local food and its heritage values reflect the deep cultural roots and unique traditions of a particular destination.

Thus, selecting effective marketing strategies through appropriate advertising and promotional channels—both non-digital (e.g., brochures, posters, travel guides) and digital (e.g., television, radio, websites, blogs, Facebook, and X which formerly known as Twitter)—is essential for communicating both implicit and explicit aspects of local food heritage. Additional engagement between policymakers and marketers, often comprising industrial entities and/or non-governmental organisations, about the requisite tourism product, such as local food and its heritage information, is essential before implementing strategic marketing strategies and tourism policies.

Focusing on Malaysia and its local food heritage, this study aims to develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how the Malaysian government collaborates with relevant stakeholders to construct a local identity for tourism marketing and branding. This is examined through the integration of local food heritage into national tourism policies and marketing strategies, drawing on Hall et al.'s (2003) concept of 'regionality,' White and Frew's (2011) framework of tourist destination identity, and Jenkins et al.'s (2011) definition of 'tourist destination'.

**Positioning Malaysia as a Tourism Destination Through Its Local Food Heritage:** While local food heritage has demonstrated its appeal to tourists and its potential to enhance a destination's image, it is crucial to comprehend the complex nature of local culinary concepts and their impact on tourism growth. Moreover, integrating knowledge of local food heritage into tourism is deemed beneficial due to its connection to local identity (Richards, 2015). Local food heritage possesses significant potential to attract diverse tourist market segments, especially those seeking to taste local food and appreciate its heritage values.

In a multiethnic country like Malaysia, integrating local food heritage into the tourism industry aims not merely to capture the eyes of potential tourists but also to cultivate a deeper awareness of Malaysia's rich culinary specialities (Kim & Lee, 2022). Recognising the substantial potential of local food heritage to enhance tourism and drive economic growth, the Malaysian government has implemented a comprehensive strategy to promote and integrate local cuisine into the nation's destination branding initiatives (Jalis, 2024).

The promotion of multiethnicity in Malaysia, however, has influenced the local food heritage. The Malaysian government faces the problem of portraying diversity in a positive light while still positioning Malaysian cuisine in the minds of tourists. Figure 1 includes images and promotional posters from a variety of Malaysian government marketing materials and websites.

In 2006, the Malaysian government incorporated culinary specialities, including local food heritage, into the national agenda, as outlined in the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006–2010). This initiative aimed to foster the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly within the food industry. Simultaneously, there was a growing recognition of the significance of Malaysian cuisine in enhancing the country's global branding. This movement resulted in the launch of two significant Malaysian cuisine marketing initiatives (the Malaysia Kitchen Programme (MKP) and CitraRasa). In 2007, MTPB created a strategic marketing plan (i.e., the Promotional Plan 2007/2008) to promote local food heritage as part of the tourism experience in Malaysian destinations. This initiative was the first time Malaysian culinary, including local food heritage specialities, were discovered and incorporated into a national and worldwide tourism marketing strategy.

**Figure 1: Tourism Malaysia poster and campaign for Malaysia Truly Asia**



Source: Retrieve on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, from Tourism website  
<https://www.tourism.gov.my/campaigns/view/malaysia-truly-asia>

Signature dishes such as *Nasi Lemak* (a traditional Malaysian dish, consists of rice cooked in coconut milk and served with fried dried anchovies, peanuts, and spicy chilli paste.– see Figure 3), *Roti Canai* (fried round flat bread), *Laksa* (noodle shape made from rice flour served with spicy gravy and accompaniments – see Figure 2), *Rendang* (beef or chicken cooked with coconut milk, lemongrass, ginger, and scented with turmeric leaf), *Char Kuey Teow* (fried rice flat noodles with eggs, soy sauce, beansprout and prawn), and *Satay* (skewed beef or chicken grilled served with peanut sauce and rice cake) are often employed in Malaysian government and tourism stakeholders marketing collaterals to promote the country. A signature dish refers to a specific recipe or culinary creation that symbolises a particular location or individual. This is referred to as a branding strategy for constructing pictures of tourist destinations in tourism marketing. The concept of a signature dish remains ambiguous, yet scholars continue to debate its connection to national dishes, food heritage (Timothy, 2016), and iconic cuisines (Everett, 2015). Regardless of whether a dish is classified as national, heritage, or iconic, it serves as a representation of the culture and lifestyle of a specific community or ethnic group. Utilising a signature dish as a symbol of a tourism destination can function as an effective branding strategy to attract target tourist markets. A signature dish not only cultivates a desire among targeted audiences to sample certain local food but also shapes and enhances the impressions and imagery of a particular tourism destination in the minds of tourists.

**Figure 2: Penang Laksa**



Source: Retrieved on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2025, from Tourism Malaysia's official website at  
<https://ebrochures.malaysia.travel/calendar-of-events/>

**Figure 3: Malaysian Nasi Lemak and Teh Tarik demonstration at Malaysia Travel Escapade 2024 in Singapore, Suntec City Mall (Convention Centre) from 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024**



Source: Retrieved on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2025 from Tourism Malaysia's official website at <https://www.tourism.gov.my/media/view/tourism-malaysia-showcases-malaysian-breakfast-culture-in-singapore>

Scholars, particularly Malaysian academics, have increasingly explored the role of local food and culinary specialities in marketing Malaysia as a tourist destination, driven by the Malaysian government's ongoing initiatives. Much of the existing research has focused on tourists' perceptions and understanding of Malaysian cuisine, examining how food imagery and experiences influence their travel decisions and overall destination experiences. Jalis et al. (2009), using a survey questionnaire, found that most Western tourists perceived Malaysian gastronomic offerings as an enhancement to their travel experiences. Similarly, Roozbeh et al. (2013) suggested that first-time and repeat tourists may exhibit different perspectives. Their study on the impact of food experiences on overall satisfaction revealed that Malaysian cuisine plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' overall travel experiences.

Although the aforementioned research shows how popular Malaysian food and culinary specialities are with tourists, little is known about their significance from the supply side, especially about the role of tourism authorities, including relevant tourism policies and marketing strategies. Other studies have examined Malaysian food, focusing primarily on particular dishes or culture, the restaurant and food industry, religious customs, and branding. The incorporation of local food heritage into Malaysian destination marketing has not been extensively studied.

### **3. Methodology**

This study involved the collection and analysis of archival documents from two main categories: (i) marketing collateral, including promotional brochures, travel guides, and posters available on official websites, such as e-brochures, and (ii) tourism-related policies and strategic destination marketing plans from relevant government agencies. These materials were analysed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the strategic planning approach employed to promote Malaysia as a tourist destination. Specifically, the analysis examined relevant tourism policies that have shaped the integration of local food heritage into destination marketing strategies, as well as the representation of individual dishes or meals in marketing communication platforms. This study exclusively utilised archival records produced by the Malaysian government and its agencies that were publicly accessible without restrictions from 2020 to January 2025.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, four tests were conducted to minimise potential bias in the findings. Table 1 summarises the four tests.

**Table 1: The four tests of trustworthiness and rigour of data**

Tests	Execution procedures for this study
Construct validity assesses the appropriateness of the operational measures used to examine the concept under investigation.	Multiple sources of evidence were utilised to enhance the robustness of the study.
Internal validity establishes causal relationships while distinguishing them from spurious correlations.	Thematic analysis was conducted following the seven-stage framework to systematically analyse all data collected, particularly archival documents.
External validity determines the extent to which the findings can be generalised across different contexts.	Used the literal or logical replication to the archival documents.
Reliability ensures consistency in the research process by maintaining a standardised methodological approach.	Developed a research design (i.e., the step-by-step) as guidance in data collection.

The data collected from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. For archival documents, the thematic analysis involved extracting relevant data from individual transcripts and systematically organising each identified code into separate file cards. The final stage of this analysis entailed reporting the findings after completing the entire coding process, which included identifying and categorising themes from the raw data. The analytical process followed seven stages, drawing upon established frameworks outlined by various scholars on thematic analysis in phenomenological research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### 4. Findings and Results

The analysis of archival documents revealed that local food heritage and specialities are integral components of Malaysia's cultural identity, contributing to the added value of its tourism industry. One of the key tourism strategies outlined in the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–1995) emphasised the development of a distinctive Malaysian image and identity within the tourism sector (Economic Planning Unit, 2022a). In this plan, special types of tourism that matched Malaysian values and lifestyles were set up. This plan focuses on protecting and improving the national heritage while celebrating the culture and lifestyles of different groups. Malaysia's diverse culture is seen as a valuable benefit for tourists. The local culture was highlighted for its interesting and unique qualities. A strong cultural foundation filled with stories, music and dance, customs, crafts, buildings, and unique foods was established in this plan.

The Malaysian government has allocated substantial funds to the development of information technology (IT) infrastructure from the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000) to the present (Economic Planning Unit, 2022b). This decision was made based on the significant potential for economic development that IT can provide. Advancements in information and communications technology (ICT) have reshaped tourism marketing, making it more dynamic. In response, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), such as Tourism Malaysia and other relevant agencies, have enhanced their official websites to provide greater interactivity. These improvements enable the continuous dissemination and updating of information on Malaysian cuisine as part of the tourism experience. Key features include details on culinary tour packages, e-brochures showcasing local cuisine, and updates on food-related events and festivals, accessible anytime and from any location. This shift represents a new phase in the country's destination marketing strategies.

Furthermore, the Department of Heritage Malaysia has undertaken proactive initiatives to preserve and safeguard the nation's cultural and heritage assets. These measures have facilitated the preservation of the narrative of culinary traditions that have been passed down through generations. In May 2009, the Department published the National Food Heritage List (NFHL), a compilation of heritage foods (Elis, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2009), and 100 commodities were initially identified and listed under the NFHL. In August 2014, in conjunction with Malaysia's 57th Independence Day celebrations, Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, who served as the tourism minister at the time, announced the recognition of 151 cuisines as part of the nation's food heritage (FTM Reporters, 11th August 2014). He further explained that these culinary traditions were classified under the "intangible cultural heritage" provision of the National Heritage Act 2005. According to the Act, intangible heritage includes various forms of cultural expression, such as language, oral traditions, folklore, poetry, songs,

dance, theatre, performing arts, and martial arts, all of which are linked to Malaysia's historical and cultural identity.

Thematic analysis of marketing materials from selected Malaysian government agencies indicated that adjectives such as spicy, aromatic, and hot were commonly used, highlighting the prominence of chillies and spices in Malaysia's local food heritage. Additionally, descriptive terms emphasising the uniqueness of local culinary traditions were employed to convey the types of gastronomic experiences that tourists might anticipate when sampling Malaysian cuisine. The concept of recognition pertains to the strong connection between local food heritage and geographical identity (Boyne & Hall, 2004). As previously said, local food heritage may be utilised to promote a destination's identity and attract tourists. One marketing strategy used by the Malaysian government to attract tourists is to emphasise local culinary speciality from a specific area or region. As a result, terms such as 'popular', 'favourites', and 'speciality' were commonly employed.

The aforementioned results were further substantiated by food sensory experiences and the nation and territory, which were respectively represented in specific dishes/meals in images that were repeatedly identified through the thematic analysis of photographs used in the collected marketing collaterals. This finding is consistent with Boyne et al.'s (2003) theory, which asserts that the development of a region's character and cultural identity plays a fundamental role in location-based tourism. This move is achieved by incorporating the portrayal of local food heritage into the marketing collateral. An alternative method of illustrating the concept of local food heritage that reflects a multiethnic identity is the use of images of communal meals that foster togetherness. These images feature a diverse group of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, all of whom are smiling and eating together while using a diverse set of cutlery. Malaysia's global image as a multiethnic nation has influenced the representation of its local food heritage, positioning culinary traditions as a key aspect of cultural identity in tourism promotion. However, the government and tourism agencies face challenges in presenting an inclusive and representative portrayal that authentically reflects the country's diverse ethnic influences. While efforts have been made to incorporate various cultural traditions, the selection and promotion of specific dishes may unintentionally prioritise certain cuisines over others, potentially marginalising lesser-known yet culturally significant food traditions. This raises important questions about how Malaysia's food heritage narrative aligns with broader goals of cultural sustainability, inclusivity, and heritage preservation in tourism marketing.

## Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the term 'tourism industry' was officially incorporated into Malaysian government policy in 1966, recognising its potential as a driver of national economic growth. Since then, the sector has undergone steady expansion, supported by successive policy initiatives. In 2010, tourism was identified as one of the twelve National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs), securing federal funding allocations until 2020 as part of broader economic transformation efforts.

Integrating local culinary history into Malaysia's destination marketing strategy requires coordination among multiple federal agencies under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC). Key institutions, such as the Department of Heritage Malaysia and Tourism Malaysia, have played central roles in positioning local food heritage as a core element of tourism promotion. Additionally, national development plans—particularly the Rancangan Malaysia Lima Tahun (RMKs), presented by the Prime Minister every five years—have significantly influenced the incorporation of Malaysia's culinary heritage into official tourism policies.

However, managing destination marketing in Malaysia remains complex, involving multiple stakeholders with differing priorities and interests. A key challenge lies in balancing economic imperatives with cultural preservation, as different actors may advocate distinct approaches to promoting Malaysia's food heritage. This underscores the need for a coherent and inclusive policy framework that accommodates perspectives from governmental bodies, industry players, and cultural heritage advocates to ensure that local food traditions are both effectively marketed and safeguarded for future generations.

A thematic analysis of photographs and textual content suggests that Malaysian tourism authorities carefully select imagery and language to communicate the significance of the country's local food heritage. Establishing a clear and distinctive culinary identity is essential, particularly given competition from neighbouring nations

such as Singapore and Indonesia, which share similar gastronomic traditions.

The findings further suggest that leveraging local food heritage as a marketing tool serves a dual function: reinforcing Malaysia's multiethnic identity while fostering cultural power-sharing among the three predominant ethnic groups—Malays, Chinese, and Indians. By incorporating diverse culinary traditions into destination marketing strategies, the representation of Malaysia's food heritage symbolically reflects broader socio-cultural dynamics. However, the extent to which this inclusivity is equitably distributed remains a critical consideration. Dominant narratives in tourism promotion may privilege certain cuisines over others, subtly shaping perceptions of cultural hierarchy within the national identity framework. More than a culinary tradition, local food heritage embodies a sense of unity among Malaysia's diverse ethnic and religious communities. This aligns with Hashimoto and Telfer's (2006) research, which explores how Canada's culinary traditions have been integrated into destination marketing strategies.

Tourism and food-related policies play a pivotal role in shaping national agendas, providing strategic frameworks for positioning local food heritage as a distinctive aspect of Malaysia's tourism experience. Marketing materials serve as key intermediaries, offering prospective tourists' insights into local food heritage experiences, including their historical significance and associated dining establishments.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of collaboration between tourism and food industry stakeholders in effectively marketing and branding Malaysia through its local food heritage. Such coordinated efforts can enhance the destination's appeal, attracting both first-time and returning tourists to explore specific locations. However, the long-term success of these strategies depends on sustained support from the government and key tourism-related organizations.

A major challenge for the Malaysian government in advancing this initiative lies in defining local food heritage within the nation's diverse cultural landscape. This complexity reflects broader questions of cultural representation in the construction of national identity. The *National Heritage Food List* (NHFL) appears to function as a strategic tool for maintaining balance in representing culinary traditions from the three largest ethnic communities—Malays, Chinese, and Indians—helping to mitigate potential intra-ethnic tensions regarding the recognition and ownership of Malaysia's local food heritage. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including the government, tourists, and food businesses, can be viewed as more tangible evidence of collaboration among the three largest ethnic groups. This collaboration might be improved and adjusted in terms of ensuring that all stakeholders have equal opportunities to participate and be involved. Integrating local food heritage into destination marketing strategies entails more than just placing the right images and descriptions; it also includes offering sensory experiences and leveraging the story behind the meal itself.

The adoption of a qualitative research approach is constrained by limits, particularly regarding the generalisability of results, which are confined to the scope and data type. The data, primarily from archival sources, was gathered between 2020 and January 2025. Archival materials were examined to better understand how local food heritage has been integrated into Malaysia's destination marketing strategies over time. Nevertheless, certain archive materials have restricted access and remain classified. Future empirical studies might benefit from involving researchers as team members to engage in the comprehensive process of incorporating local food traditions into destination marketing efforts. This step would enable academics to examine the discourse among many tourism stakeholders, particularly during the planning phase. Further examination of the discussions and negotiations among tourism stakeholders might illuminate the selection of particular meals or dishes that symbolise the culinary identity of the tourist destination.

**Declaration of Competing Interest:** The authors declare no known financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work presented in this paper. The authors are not appointed as Editorial Board Members, Editor-in-Chief, Associate Editors, or Guest Editors for this journal. Nor were they involved in the editorial review or the decision to publish this article.



**Acknowledgement:** The authors thank Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Taylor's University, and Universiti Utara Malaysia for their support in this research. A special thanks to all tourism stakeholders involved in this study, including Tourism Malaysia (i.e., the DMO), the Ministry of Art, Tourism and Culture, and the Department of Heritage Malaysia.

## References

- Bessiere, J., & Tibere, L. (2013). Traditional food and tourism: French tourist experience and food heritage in rural spaces. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 93(14), 3420–3425. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsfa.6284>
- Boyne, S., & Hall, D. (2004). Place promotion through food and tourism: Rural branding and the role of websites. *Place Branding*, 1(1), 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990007>
- Boyne, S., Hall, D., & Williams, F. (2003). Policy, support and promotion for food-related tourism initiatives: A marketing approach to regional development. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 14(3–4), 131–154. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v14n03\\_08](https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v14n03_08)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Dixit, S. K., & Prayag, G. (2022). Gastronomic tourism experiences and experiential marketing. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 47(3), 217–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2022.2065089>
- Economic Planning Unit. (2022a). *Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995*. <http://www.epu.gov.my/documents/10124/46da7926-51ec-4797-86b0-33a1720d062c>
- Economic Planning Unit. (2022b). *Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000*. <http://www.epu.gov.my/epu-theme/RMK7/Chapter%2016%20-%20Tourism%20and%20Distributive%20Trade.pdf>
- Elis, S. (2009, May 11). Foreign tourists are not so into Nasi Lemak. *New Straits Times Press*. <http://malaysiahotelnews.blogspot.com.au/2009/05/foreign-tourists-not-so-into-nasi-lemak.html>
- Everett, S. (2015). Iconic cuisines, marketing, and place promotion. In D. Timothy (Ed.), *Heritage cuisines: Traditions, identities, and tourism* (pp. 119–131). Taylor & Francis.
- FTM Reports. (2014, August 11). Popiah war: Nazri fires back, lays claim to Bahasa Indonesia. *Free Malaysia Today*. <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/02/22/popiah-war-nazri-fires-back-lays-claim-to-bahasa-indonesia/>
- Hall, C. M., & Gössling, S. (2016). From food tourism and regional development to food, tourism and regional development: Themes and issues in contemporary foodscapes. In C. M. Hall & S. Gössling (Eds.), *Food tourism and regional development: Networks, products and trajectories* (pp. 20–76). Routledge.
- Hashimoto, A., & Telfer, D. J. (2006). Selling Canadian culinary tourism: Branding the global and the regional product. *Tourism Geographies*, 8(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616680500392465>
- Henderson, J. C. (2016). Local and traditional or global and modern? Food and tourism in Singapore. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 2(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.3727/216929716X14546365943494>
- Hsu, F. C., & Scott, N. (2020). Food Experience, Place Attachment, Destination Image and the Role of Food-Related Personality Traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.05.010>
- Jalis, M. H. (2016). *An analysis of the integration of local cuisine in international destination marketing strategies for Malaysia* [Doctoral dissertation, Southern Cross University].
- Jalis, M. H. (2024, April 4). Tap food heritage potential to boost tourism. *New Straits Times*. <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2024/04/1039795/tap-food-heritage-potential-boost-tourism>
- Jalis, M. H., Che, D., & Markwell, K. (2014). Utilising local cuisine to market Malaysia as a tourist destination. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144, 102–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.278>
- Kim, J. J. & Lee, C. J. (2022). A tourist's gaze on local tourism governance: The relationship between local tourism governance and brand equity, tourism attachment for sustainable tourism. *Sustainability*, 14(24), 16477. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142416477>
- Lin, Y.-C., Pearson, T. E., & Cai, L. A. (2011). Food as a form of destination identity: A tourism destination brand perspective. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 11(1), 30–48. <https://doi.org/10.1057/thr.2010.22>

- Okumus, B., Xiang, Y., & Hutchinson, J. (2018). Local cuisines and destination marketing: Cases of three cities in Shandong, China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(6), 584–599. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2018.1469521>
- Richards, G. (2015). Evolving gastronomic experiences: From food to foodies to foodscapes. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 1(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.3727/216929715X14298190828796>
- Timothy, D. J. (2016). Introduction: Heritage cuisines, foodways, and culinary traditions. In D. J. Timothy (Ed.), *Heritage cuisines: Traditions, identities, and tourism* (pp. 1–24). Routledge.
- UNWTO. (2012). *Affiliate members global report, Volume 4 - Global report on food tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284414819>
- White, L., & Frew, E. (2011). Tourism and national identities: Connections and conceptualisations. In L. White & E. Frew (Eds.), *Tourism and national identities: An international perspective* (pp. 1–10). Routledge.
- Yoshino, K. (2010). Malaysian cuisine: A case of neglected culinary globalisation. In *Globalisation, food, and social identities in the Asia Pacific region*. Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture.