

**DEVELOPING CULINARY TOURISM EXPERIENCES FOR  
INBOUND TRAVELLERS IN VIETNAM**

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In recent years, the growing popularity of Vietnamese cuisine has become an attraction of the country that motivates an increasing number of travellers to visit Vietnam to taste the cuisine. Together with food tasting, there is a wide variety of activities related to food that have the potentiality to attract international visitors. The main goal of this thesis was to provide suggestions and directions to develop culinary tourism experiences for foreign visitors in Vietnam by finding out their perspective towards current gastronomic experiences in the destination country and discovering how satisfied they were when engaging in food-involved activities. The paper also discussed inbound travellers' expectations for culinary experiences prior to the travels in Vietnam together with post-travel feelings and behaviours.

The thesis used mixed methods, in which qualitative method was primarily adopted to answer the research issue. An electronic survey was conducted and posted on different social channels. Simultaneously, interviews were carried out with the support of two experienced stakeholders working in the tourism sector.

The findings of the research revealed that most of the inbound tourists were satisfied with their food experiences in Vietnam. Generally, those experiences met their expectations, yet they still lacked some elements to go beyond what they expected. The results also showed that the country had various potentialities and advantageous opportunities to develop this emerging niche market. On the other hand, several existent problems present a threat to its growth. Amid those controversies, development solutions were suggested in an attempt to tackle the problems as well as to improve the experiences of future international visitors in the country.

**Keywords**                      culinary tourism, food-involved activities, gastronomic experiences, inbound tourists, international visitors, Vietnamese cuisine

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## FOREWORD

First of all, we are sincerely thankful to our parents for providing us with a great opportunity to pursue professional studies of the Degree Programme in Tourism at Lapland University of Applied Sciences. Studying in Lapland UAS has been one of the most memorable experiences in our student life since we have been enabled to learn in a multicultural environment, do exchange studies and internship in different countries.

Next, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Ms Ulla Kangasniemi and Ms Petra Paloniemi, who not only work as our supervisors for this paper, but they are also conscientious tutors who have been wholeheartedly guiding and helping us with every single issue during the past three years.

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## SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CTC	Canadian Tourism Commission
DMC	Destination Management Company
EPI	English Proficiency Index
M.I.C.E	Meeting, Incentive, Conference, Exhibition
SVT	ScandiVina Vietnam Tour
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VCA	Vietnam Chef Association
VNAT	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
WFTA	World Food Travel Association
WTA	World Travel Awards

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, when the tourism industry is developing dramatically and rapidly, travellers' demands are also becoming more complex and diverse. Within recent years, an increasing number of niche markets have come into existence with a view to serving the versatile needs and wants of tourists (López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares & García 2009, 421). Cuisine no longer merely plays a basic role in serving daily nourishment needs of every individual, but it has been gradually viewed as one of the major purposes or motivations for travelling. The emergence of food tourism has proven to encompass more than simply "eating and drinking" (Hall et al. 2003, 2). Having grown markedly, this novel market has been regarded as one of the most prospective and innovative sectors of the tourism industry (UNWTO 2012, 5).

Highly esteemed by international tourists, Vietnamese cuisine has been viewed as a substantially unique attraction of the country that contributes to their travel motivation. In the World Travel Awards (WTA) 2019, Vietnam won the title "Asia's Leading Culinary Destination", which once again affirms its great reputation for cuisine on the global scale. According to Graham Cooke – the founder of WTA, Vietnamese cuisine is a "must-try" experience. Although Vietnam used to be complimented on its cuisine by a lot of specialists and chefs worldwide before, it was the first time that the country achieved such a prestigious award at the international level. This has reflected the growing appeal of Vietnamese cuisine to international travellers and the potential growth of this emerging tourism category in the country. (Nguyen 2019.)

The focus of this thesis is on the development of culinary tourism experiences for inbound travellers in Vietnam. It aims to investigate the impacts of gastronomy on their travel experiences as well as to find out which factors influence these cuisine-related experiences, eating behaviours and choice of food. Besides, the main goal of the paper is to discover their perspectives on Vietnamese culinary tourism. By identifying foreign visitors' expectations before the trip, post-travel behaviours and feelings towards culinary tourism in Vietnam, the thesis helps to measure their level of satisfaction with travel experiences in the researched destination. In order to illustrate an unbiased insight into the current situation, the

paper also discusses several problems about culinary tourism that the country has been facing. After that, solutions and orientations to the remedy of these weaknesses are put forward to improve culinary tourism experiences of inbound tourists and increase their satisfaction as a result.

The commissioner of this thesis paper is ScandiVina Trading Communication and Tourism Services Co. Ltd, which is mostly mentioned as ScandiVina Vietnam Tour for marketing activities. Situated in Hanoi – the capital city of Vietnam, the company has over 10 years of experiences in delivering tourism products and services to both domestic and international travellers. ScandiVina has launched no culinary-focused programs until now, but the travel manager of the company has shown great interest in applying this concept into designing new experiences. (Nguyen 2020.) Therefore, this thesis paper may serve as a beneficial material that supports the development ideas for the company.

In response to the research question, mixed methods were used in the thesis. Most of the data in this research was primarily retrieved from qualitative methods. An online survey was published on social media to collect results from international tourists all over the world. At the same time, semi-structured interviews were carried out with two stakeholders to assess current culinary tourism in Vietnam from the perspectives of experienced specialists in the industry. One of the interviews was conducted with the commissioner while another was carried out with a representative from an inbound travel agency named Sens Asia Travel.



## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Concepts of Culinary, Food and Gastronomic Tourism

To illustrate the intimate connection between food and tourism, many scholars and experts have put forward a wide array of terminologies to name this emerging form of tourism such as “culinary tourism”, “food tourism” or “gastronomic tourism”. As a result, it has been defined in various ways from the perspectives of different researchers.

Hall and Mitchell (2001a, 308, as cited in Hall et al. 2003, 10) were one of the first to define food tourism as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factors for travel”. According to their assumptions, visits to a restaurant are not necessarily related to food tourism. Instead, it should be considered as a model of “serious leisure” where main travel motivations stem from the temptation to experience specialities of the destination or even some specific dishes performed by a renowned chef. (Hall et al. 2003, 10.) Categorized as niche tourism, it emphasizes the high interest in food that can lead travellers to the decision-making process prior to the trip and their travel behaviours afterwards.

The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC 2003, 3, as cited in Steinmetz 2010, 6) interprets culinary tourism as follows:

A variety of culinary, agritourism and agri-food activities, developed expressly for tourists that showcase food and beverages and provide an opportunity for visitors to discover dishes indigenous to each region while learning about the talent and creativity of artisans.

The concept “culinary tourism” was characterized by Long (2004, 21) as the purposeful engagement in different foodways which vary from eating, drinking, preparing to presenting dishes, cooking style, dining habits or general culinary structure belonging to another culture. The word “foodways” refers to food as a system involving a variety of activities and elements in terms of physicality, society, culture, economy, spirits and aestheticism. The foodways not only refer

to food-related customs and tradition, but also include the utilization, interpretation, and recognition of chief and ancillary dishes in the meals (Ikeda 1999, 153, as cited in Steinmetz 2010, 7).

While the definition of food tourism proposed by Hall and Mitchell (2001) focuses on describing food as a major incentive for travelling, culinary tourism defined by Long (2004, 21) in a broader sense encompasses the engagement with all cuisine-related activities. The latter definition highlights in-depth experiences with food in a touristic context, in which tourists actively take part in the procedure combining their multi-senses to access the culinary system distinct from their own. The key point underlying the definition puts no emphasis on whether tourists enjoy the cuisine at the destination, but rather on the perception of cuisine as something brand new, unfamiliar and the desire to explore it. Participants may find pleasure in local cuisine through its taste, smell and shape, which is also known as aesthetic satisfaction. On the other hand, the idea of trying some exotic dishes to fulfil one's curiosity can lead to disappointing experience as well, provided that the food whets no appetite or fails to match their eating preferences. No matter how the food-related experience can be, tourists' curiosity and their goal to discover the unknown elements are acquired at the end of the journey, which are of paramount importance to the meaning of culinary tourism. It can be understood that culinary tourism includes not only travellers whose main interest is the food, but also those who intend to seek new experiences via food with high curiosity. (Long 2004, 215–123.)

Another term that is commonly used in literature to identify this form of tourism is gastronomic tourism. Originating from the Greek language, the word "gastronomy" is a combination of two parts: "gaster" (stomach) and "nomas" (law) (Sormaz et al. 2015, 726). It is elucidated in the Encyclopedia Britannica (2000) as the art of preparing, cooking, serving, tasting food and beverage (as cited in Hjalager & Richards 2002, 4). Similar to the definition of culinary tourism, gastronomic tourism is defined as involvements with any unparalleled experiences that attach to food and beverage during travel. Besides from usual experience at local restaurants, it consists of other activities linked to gastronomy such as cooking classes, visits to local farms, vineyards or beer factories (Cagla 2012, as cited in Sormaz et al. 2015, 727). According to the United Nations World

Tourism Organization (UNWTO), gastronomic tourism refers to whom visiting or travelling to a place with primary or minor intention of tasting the local cuisine or participating in gastronomy-related activities (WTTC 2017, as cited in Long 2018, 3).

Despite the usage of different terms and how they are explained, they all share a common ground that this type of tourism refers to tourism experiences and all surrounding activities deeply connected to food or beverage at the destination. As a result, it is generally agreed that those terms can be used interchangeably in certain contexts. (Beer et al. 2012, Kim & Ellis 2014, as cited in Chen 2016, 29.)

In fact, the idea of travelling for food and drink has been in existed since prehistoric time. Early studies showed that a platform was already set to spotlight and blend food, drink, culture and tourism together around 10,000 years ago (Boniface 2003, 3). Back to around 8000 BC, human beings mainly lived by hunting animals, cultivating plants and gathering food. Since then, the needs of subsistence had urged people to move to different places to search for food and drink; yet, food and drink were merely perceived as a survival necessity in lieu of being a recreational or leisure element around that time.

Until later, the introduction of agriculture led to a significant shift in the way that food was attained, from the habits of hunting and gathering to the practice of farming. This required people to remain settled in the farmland in contrast to the previous nomadic lifestyle. The arrival of agriculture proved to be critical to shaping the culture of a society. Food and drink were adopted to represent the uniqueness of its own culture as well as differentiation from others (Boniface 2003, 5). Rich resources of food resulting from dynamic productivity made themselves carefully selected to be used in either momentous celebrations, significant events or sacred rituals (Boniface 2003, 3).

Moving to the industrialization age, the images of food and drink were gradually less seen to be associated with nature and agriculture. In place of that, people became more acquainted with them as items filled with pleasure and enjoyment. As food started to be recognized as a potential niche in the tourism industry, the concept of culinary tourism no longer concentrated solely on the action of

consuming food products in restaurants. In other words, it grew broader to encompass additional activities in the foodways procedure ranging from production (farm or factory visits), material acquisition (market or grocery tours) to preparations (participation in cooking class) and perceptions of food (through contact lessons or workshops). (Boniface 2003, 5.)

Long (2018, 6) pointed out that culinary tourism could include a wide range of forms. Nonetheless, his theoretical framework primarily focused on analysing four prevalent types that are dominating in this field of tourism. They are the most outstanding models that bear their own values, features and means of food introduction to tourists. (Long 2018, 3–6.)

Visitation to restaurants is a relatively popular part of culinary tourism. Customers visit indigenous restaurants for a variety of reasons. Besides tackling their daily needs of eating, they possibly wish to satisfy their curiosity about exotic cuisine. Some people may thirst for comfort, relaxation or simply a space where they can sit to share conversations with each other. Regardless of any reason, it is undeniably assumed that restaurants are becoming an important destination for tourists while travelling. Such visitation to restaurants is regarded as a type of culinary tourism when tourists are particularly interested into gastronomy of the place they visit. (Sengel et al. 2015, 430.)

The second model of culinary tourism that is growing rapidly in recent years is food tours and trails. The development of this form involves a business cooperation among different levels of stakeholders: government, tourism organizations, DMC (destination management companies), tour operators, to name but a few. Engaging in food tours, participants have opportunities to familiarize themselves with local cuisine by simultaneously tasting and hearing pieces of stories during their visits to the destinations. Whereas food tours are mostly accompanied by tour guides, trails can be understood as a listing or itineraries that enable tourists to explore the venues by themselves. There are a variety of approaches under which food tours can be arranged. Depending on the goals of organizers and allowed conditions, public or private locations are selected for the arrangement of the tours. Restaurants, markets or other open space are viewed as public venues, while private ones may pertain to local homes

or neighbourhood. Besides, distinctive organizations are apt to have different purposes of offering tours to tourists. The ones held by DMCs or tour operators may aim at promoting destination brand through gastronomy. On the other hand, the ones offered by schools or universities tend to orient students to the hidden cultural and spiritual values of the displayed dishes. (Long 2018, 9.)

Food events and festivals are another form holding a momentous presence in this tourism domain. They play a significant part in highlighting local specialties and the image of the region where they are held. These events and festivals help to connect local people and tourists together through mutual engagement in food-theme celebrations and activities. Besides, the regional identity can be promoted through the introduction of local food in these festivals and events. (Lee & Arcodia 2011, 355–356.)

Cooking classes and demonstrations also play a vital part in culinary tourism, but they do not invariably appear as a separate type of this tourism. Instead, they are commonly found to be a part of food tours or similar programs particularly designed for food travellers. Food classes are sometimes integrated with market tours or visitation to farms. These classes are inclined to approach tourists who have already acquired some understanding of local gastronomy to a certain extent and may aspire to discover it seriously by learning how to prepare or perform the dishes. Unlike other forms of culinary tourism, cooking classes usually allow more personal experiences and intimate communication with the host. Interaction in such small groups enables participants to thoroughly comprehend the meaning of each dish presented as well as varied stages in its preparation process. (Long 2018, 11–12; UNWTO 2012, 31.)

Cooking shows share similarity with classes in how food is demonstrated to tourists. Watching these cooking demonstrations is also considered as a type of culinary experience for tourists. Long (2018, 12) claimed that this form is perceived as a more passive way of learning compared to cooking classes due to lack of tourists' engagement with the food. For the most part, participants observe the process instead of taking part in cooking with chefs. (UNWTO 2012, 6.)

While Long (2018) described the most popular forms of culinary tourism, Smith and Xiao (2008, 290) categorized culinary-related resources into four separate groups based on their characteristics. These groups include all the models where participants can engage to attain experiences associated with either cuisine or wine. Table 1 shows the typology of culinary tourism resources based on their research.

Table 1. Typology of Culinary Tourism Resources (Smith & Xiao, 2008)

Facilities	Activities	Events	Organizations
<p><b>Buildings/Structures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restaurants (<i>Kebab houses e.g. İmam Çağdaş, Halil Usta; Coffeehouses e.g. Tahmis Kahvecisi; Pastries e.g. Koçak Baklava, Zeki Usta; Soup restaurants e.g. Metanet</i>)</li> <li>Food-related museums (e.g. <i>Emine Göğüş Culinary Museum, Pistachio Museum</i>)</li> <li>Markets (<i>Kitchenware e.g. Bakırcılar Çarşısı; Food and beverages e.g. Almacı, Bakırcılar</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Land Uses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food districts</li> <li>Farms (e.g. pistachio farms)</li> </ul> <p><b>Routes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food routes</li> <li>Gourmet trails</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consumption</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dining at restaurants</li> <li>Purchasing retail food and beverages</li> </ul> <p><b>Touring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City food districts</li> <li>Agricultural regions</li> </ul> <p><b>Education/Observation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observing food processing</li> <li>Participating in harvesting, cooking</li> <li>Reading food beverage magazines, books</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consumer Shows</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food shows (e.g. Natural Life Market)</li> </ul> <p><b>Festivals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food festivals (e.g. GastroAntep, Shira)</li> <li>Harvest festivals (e.g. Pistachio Festival)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Associations</b> (e.g. UCCN)</p> <p><b>Food Classification Systems</b> (e.g. Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, Geographical Indications)</p>

According to their framework, culinary tourism is divided into four major categories, namely facilities, activities, events and organizations. The first group consists of facilities such as manufacture-oriented buildings, land utilization, wine or food routes and trails. The second group concentrates on a variety of activities ranging from food consumption at the destination to engagement in culinary tours or attendance at educational institutes to learn about food. The third category covers events, festivals that draw tourists' attention to indigenous cuisine. The final segment shown in Smith and Xiao's typology comprises departments, organizations and associations dealing with issues concerning food or restaurant systems. (Smith & Xiao 2008, 290.)

## 2.2 Role of Food in Tourism Experience

### 2.2.1 Understanding Tourism Experience

For years, tourism experience has been a significant scope of study for many researchers. According to Ooi (2003, 2–3), the study of experience within the tourism field is divided into these five separate sections, which is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Main Categories of Tourism Experience Research (OECD 2012, 15)

Tourism experiences' perceptive psychology	Impact of tourism experiences	Level of engagement in tourism experiences	Tourism experiences from phenomenological aspects	Distance between tourism experiences and daily life
Offers an insight into tourist cognitions and illustrates their impacts on travel experiences (Mannell & Iso 1987). Perceptions and expectations cultivated by tourists before the trip could influence the formation of their travel behaviors and experiences occurring later.	Travelers search for experiences that can satisfy themselves regarding emotional aspects, sense of wellness and knowledge attainment (Prentice et al. 1998).	Highlights tourism experiences that are evaluated as unique, quintessential and appealing to travelers (Quan & Wang 2004).	Aims to collect variations of experiences instead of completely focusing on the "optimal experience" (Cohen 1979).	Experiences gained within travels are totally different from the ones existing in daily life. These distinctions are appealing to travelers, awakening their interests in seeking novel experiences (Urry 1990).

It is assumed that concretizing and categorizing variations of tourism experiences are challenging. This is due to the fact that experiences are mostly associated with personal emotions, while each individual tends to develop perceptions and feelings in his own way. It is inevitable that tourism experiences can dramatically vary even though a common tourism product is distributed to tourists. Due to this,

many studies are likely to pay attention to how experiences are formed rather than offering insights into every single experience gained by an individual (Ooi 2003, 1; OECD 2012, 15).

In order to deal with the intricacy of personal experience, some researchers focus on describing the ones observed as most popular and influential to travellers. A substantial number of frameworks have pointed out the circumstances under which valuable experiences can be successfully obtained. One of the attributes that makes up meaningful experiences is the great concentration that captivates all basic senses of an individual. Along with that, these experiences involve altered perceptions of time, feeling of pleasure, relaxation and sense of being at the helm of a situation. Experiences usually occur when something is done and undergone through a process, in which there is an interaction between human and realistic objects. Correspondingly, the uniqueness and inherent value of the process discerned by an individual is also another feature of meaningful experiences. (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen 2008, 20–27.)

The process of experiential conceptualizations has been developed in different stages, from making analysis of distinctive individual experiences towards the exchange within the phrase of experience production and eventually towards the additional networks that are fundamental for successful experience design in the era of computer-based technology. Figure 1 in the next page presents the evolution of experience concepts along two lines: the vertical one comparing individual with collective characteristics of experience, whereas the horizontal one indicating different types of experience through three main generations. (OECD 2012, 17.)



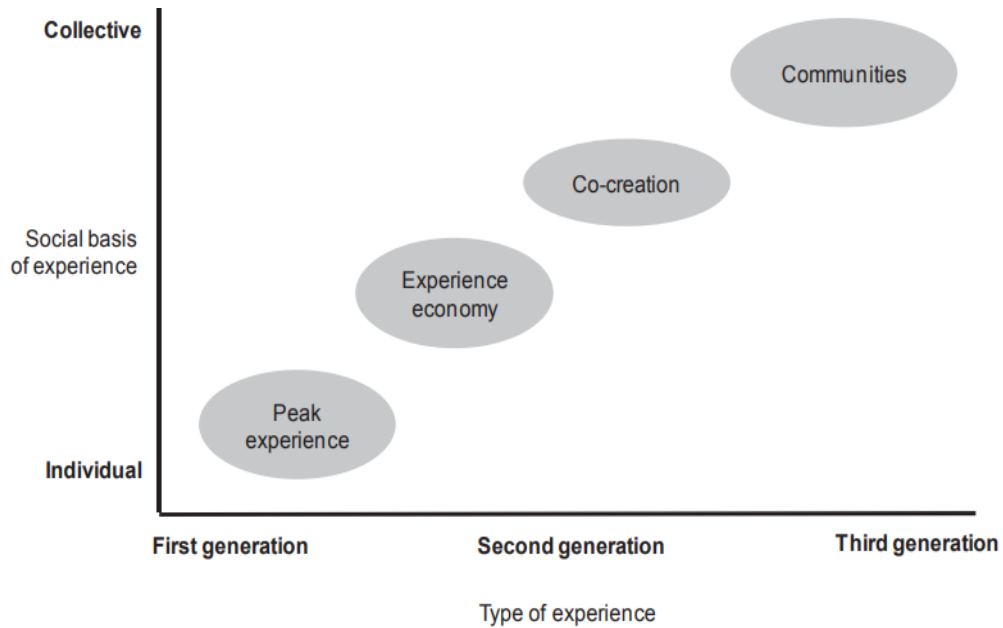


Figure 1. Evolution of Experience Concept (OECD 2012).

In the first generation where enjoyment was sought, the peak experience turned into the main motivation for travel decision and tourism consumption (Richards 2001, 2). Gradually, demands for travelling substantially increased, which led to diverse needs and wants of tourists. In that condition, many recreational, entertaining or other tourism services were created to meet the varied demands of consumers. These industries, as a result, added considerably to the augmentation of these experiences. The growing emergence of entertainment venues such as amusement parks, shopping malls made a remarkable contribution to the enhancement of tourism experiences from the 1950s onwards. (OECD 2012, 16.)

As tourism became an increasingly competitive market where the demands of tourists got more complicated, service providers were required to reinforce their available products or launch new ideas of service in order to satisfy consumers. The growing presence of such demanding markets has switched the peak experience to an experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 1999, 10). Crucial factors that mostly contribute to the formation of experiences are the chief product or service with specific themes, concepts and presentations (OECD 2012, 16). In culinary tourism, food plays a chief role in the process of experience design, since food service providers have been in attempts to create more valuable experiences by seeking methods for improving their food-linked products. In this

phase, it is sometimes claimed that the experience economy principally emphasizes the role of suppliers in innovating experiences without mentioning the influence of consumers upon the construction and adaptation of these experiences. It was not until the second generation that suppliers began to take consumer awareness into account and integrate it into the procedure of experience production. This phase is known as co-creation where both providers and consumers co-operate with the common goal to produce, develop and adapt experiences. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, 5–6; OECD 2012, 17.)

In the third-generation, a community is built owing to the rapid growth of social networks, which serves as a platform to keep producers in touch with consumers and vice versa. The rising role of networks in experience production and development is by degrees getting visible in the establishment of value networks. In this stage, the traditional process of value creation is substituted by a more prevailing value chain where stakeholders at different levels work closely together with the support of social networks. (Porter 1980 & Richards 2010, as cited in OECD 2012, 17.)

The trend of co-creation is also implemented in the field of culinary tourism. To give an illustration, nowadays, food tourists prefer to add the activities of producing and preparing food to their experiences apart from their consumption activity. Therefore, they are no longer seen as passive experience receivers who simply consume the food products, yet they are becoming active contributors to their own experience creation process, in which they deeply engage in various activities surrounding food and attain knowledge of cuisine. (Richards 2011, 2.)

### 2.2.2 Food as Indispensable Element in Tourism Experience

Eating is an indispensable activity during travels, which serves more than simply a survival necessity in human life. In the tourism industry, the role of food is relatively different from its role in regular eating routine. To the majority of travellers, food is considered as an allurements of the destination, which makes itself one of the main incentives for travelling. By and large, most experienced tourists assume that eating out during a trip is an essential activity regarding social aspect, and an experience that should not be missed at the same time. It

creates tourists' expectation towards the place they tend to visit. The concept of eating and drinking out while being away from home is regarded as leisure hunting. These food-involved activities display social and interactive features, which is visible in the way they allow people to meet and communicate with each other. (Telfer 1996, 1.)

Hall et al. (2003, 3) also emphasized that food has been a crucial component of production and consumption in the tourism industry. The study conducted by Hudman showed that the importance of food in tourism experience has been progressively evident as it accounts for 25% of travellers' total spending. Additionally, the result of another study indicates that nowadays most travellers are inclined to set aside a separate amount of expenditure for food apart from other costs. (Ardabili et al. 2011, 827.)

Since the value of food is highly evaluated in the modern society, its appearance is increasingly seen to be linked with travel experiences. By virtue of growing significance to tourist experience, food has become a factor deciding their overall satisfaction towards the trip (Nield, Kozak & LeGrys 2000, Rimmington & Yuksel 1998, as cited in Hall et al. 2003, 7).

Some travellers desire to get away from their ordinary life and "escape" to a destination in quest of experiences disparate from their repeated activities that take place on a daily basis. Particularly, travellers whose main concern is food may wish to "escape" from daily diet and look for novel, exotic dining experiences. (Kristensen 2017, 13.) This expectation has awakened their interest in setting off a journey to explore local specialities or other related activities that have yet to be tried previously.

It is apparent that people travel for different purposes; thus, there are certainly those who see food outside their main interest. However, at some points, curiosity about unfamiliar cuisine may stimulate their desire to experience it during the journey. It is also unlikely to happen that tourists only consume the same type of food products in the same location while travelling to another place (Cleave 2011, 43). In this sense, tasting distinctive types of food may incidentally turn into an experience that responds to what tourists wonder about the unknown cuisine in the beginning (Cohen 1972, as cited in Chen 2013, 15). As eating and drinking

are an obligatory part of the trip, it is virtually impossible to travel without these activities. Therefore, the food can be unpalatable or fail to satisfy their expectations, but it somehow becomes a new experience for visitors afterwards (Ardabili et al. 2011, 827).

In order to highlight the role of food in tourism to a greater extent, the studies carried by OECD discuss the development of dining experience. This phase is a deciding factor of tourists' satisfaction, as it offers tourists a favourable condition to enjoy the optimal parts of gastronomic experiences. In addition, the studies illustrate that food can be a distinguishing feature that contributes to creating a competitive advantage for the destination on the national or international level. Food is a driving mechanism for the cycle of production and consumption in the culinary tourism market, helping to adapt to volatile needs and wants of tourists. This intangible network involves the participation of different individuals such as food manufacturers, chefs, food bloggers, news reporters, culinary influencers. (OECD 2012, 20; Kristensen 2017, 14.)

### 2.2.3 Behind Memorable Culinary Tourism Experiences

Involving the five senses, food and drink are of paramount importance to the memory as they provoke reminiscence in connection with perception, emotion and physical activities (Sutton 2001; Holtzman 2006). As a matter of fact, there are a variety of explanations for why food is one of the most unforgettable elements within a journey. One of the reasons is that food memories usually pertain to a certain setting or occasion. By way of illustration, the food or the setting where it is placed can turn daily habits such as eating and drinking into exceptional experiences. It is claimed that novelty is an indispensable component of food experiences, making food the "source of distinction, discourse, and hence memory" (Sutton 2001, 199). In the tourism context, the "novelty" element is noticeable when diverse food and drink are demonstrated in varied settings with the participation of non-identical individuals. (Stone et al. 2017, 2.)

Within nearly the past two decades, researchers have been studying the driving factors of noteworthy culinary experiences. Table 3 in the following page presents a few aspects that play a crucial part in making culinary experiences memorable.

Table 3. Determining Factors of Memorable Culinary Experiences (Stone et al. 2017)

Determinants	Proposed Definitions	Based on
Local culture	Offers the opportunity to taste dishes made with local ingredients, recipes and technique	J-H. Kim (2014); Lin and Mao (2015); Quan and Wang (2004)
Décor	Facilitates the immersion into the food/drink experience through the use of music, design, architecture, color and smell	J-H. Kim (2014); Magnini and Thelen (2008)
Service quality	Based on the extent to which the staff is perceived by travelers as being friendly, courteous, helpful, and willing to go the extra mile	J-H. Kim (2014)
Social interaction	Relates to whether the food/drink experience fosters social interactions between the travelers and the residents, as well as between the travelers and their traveling party	Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013, 2015); Chandralal, Rindfleisch, and Valenzuela (2015)
Novelty	Refers to the extent to which the food/drink experience provides an intensification of daily life experiences by offering novel, fresh and original features	Quan and Wang (2004); Ritchie and Crouch (2003).

Apart from food – the core element, there are five other determinants indicated in the table. Indigenous culture is a primary factor leading to these memorable experiences, since it provides consumers with a chance to learn through the demonstration of various dishes with “local ingredients, recipes and technique” (Quan & Wang 2004, Kim 2014, Lin & Mao 2015). The second determinant is décor, which helps tourists to engage in the gastronomic experience together with peripheral elements including “music, design, architecture, colour, and smell” (Magini & Thelen 2008, Kim 2014). Service quality is the third element, which is largely dependent on the degree of hospitality shown by the staff to visitors. The food and how the staffs serve customers with it is seen to interrelate closely. The poor service quality can negatively affect tourists’ overall experiences no matter how excellent the food is. After this social interaction is another component of such meaningful experiences that contribute to the development of the

relationship between the tourists and their travel partners or between the tourists and the locals. Novelty is the last determinant that appears in the table. Allowing an openness to unfamiliar environments, this element can help to take tourists' ordinary daily experiences to the next level with the addition of new, exotic food and drink elements. (Ritchie & Crouch 2003; Quan & Wang 2004.)

Although it is widely agreed upon taking a whole trip into account while evaluating whether tourism experiences are memorable or not, every single element should be seen as the root of memories. First, location is an external element that needs to be included in these unforgettable experiences. As tourism involves travelling to somewhere other than a daily place of residence, the location for its occurrence can hold a substantial role in bringing about meaningful experiences. The location in this context can be understood as a whole country, province, city or a specific venue such as a restaurant, coffee shop. Depending on tourists' purpose, they may select a location that is believed to be relevant and unforgettable to their own experience celebrations. (Stone et al. 2017, 4–6.)

Another external factor that helps to link experiences to memory is special occasions. When these experiences occur during “honeymoons, anniversaries, and birthdays”, they are more likely to become long-lasting memories because of their direct connection to people's life events. In this situation, it would have been almost impossible for memorable experiences to take place in the absence of celebration settings even though the food and drink may leave a positive impression on participants. (Stone et al. 2017, 7.)

Apart from the physical features above-mentioned, the framework also identified some aspects related to sociology, culture and psychology that facilitates the recollection of culinary tourism experiences. From the perspectives of tourists, locality and authenticity are the fundamental constituents of these experiences. The locality element can become unforgettable to the memory, as it represents unique and specific features of a region's gastronomy. (Stone et al. 2017, 5.) In the age of globalization nowadays, a well-known traditional food of a particular place can be widely replicated all over the world, making itself much easier to be found outside where it originates. On top of that, there is also a rising concern over the quality of today food experiences, principally due to the rapid growth of

fast-food chains that are prone to prevail the international market and overshadow the value of local food in the future. Be that as it may, there are still many people who wish to look for the locality in the experiences attached to original gastronomic products while travelling. (OECD 2012, 21.)

Coupled with the locality, authenticity is another chief determinant leading to successful food or drink experiences for culinary tourists. Authenticity is identified as “the degree to which something is more or less what it ought to be” (Appadurai 1986, as cited in Huynh 2012, 31). This concept is not only applicable to some specific food, drinks or restaurants but also the entire experiences within the travel. In other words, tourists should be able to enjoy all elements belonging to these experiences in a real, unscripted and original manner. These two factors “locality” and “authenticity” can be fulfilled by providing the optimal conditions during the procedure of experience development. To that end, it is imperative that materials should be ensured in terms of quality and the preparation phase should also require a great deal of attention as well as high concentration. (Stone et al. 2017, 8.)

### 2.3 Benefits of Culinary Tourism in Destination

#### 2.3.1 Role of Food in Today’s Society

Culinary tourism is a subdivision of agri-tourism, which highlights the seeking for and enjoyment of preparing food and drink (Okech 2014, 2). Food can be considered as the primary or secondary trip motivator (Quan & Wang 2014, 302), which raises the value of one destination. Among a large number of tangible and intangible heritage in tourism, food acts as a tangible item that illustrates the manifestation of the culture, therefore, may help create an authentic cultural experience for tourists (Okumus, Okumus & McKercher 2007). Furthermore, local cuisine can be taken into account when distinguishing two countries, since the ingredients in food represent culture, tradition as well as the identity of a nation (Rand, Heath & Alberts 2003).

Being one of the cultural tourism products, the importance of food has been increasing considerably. Culinary tourism becomes one factor that tourists use to measure the quality of a trip, which means, destinations that provide better

cuisine will have the advantage in this competitive race. Consequently, culinary tourism contributes partly to the overall economic performance (Wijaya 2019).

The influence of cuisine may go beyond cultural and economic aspects. It is believed that culinary tourism is beneficial to the improvement of food safety and food security of the nation, as well as the enhancement in sustainability tourism since the popularity of cuisine is spreading everywhere in the world, from urban to rural areas.

### 2.3.2 Cultural Benefits

The concept of culture is one of the key concepts in our society's wealth of knowledge. It is complex, dynamic, constantly changing and refined (Wijaya 2019, 2), results in the sophisticated issues related to culinary tourism. In terms of sociology and anthropology, we understand culture as everything that is acquired through learning, shared, and passed from generations to generations among a group of people (Mennell 1992). There are different ways to manifest the culture of a nation, through language, literature, art, music, and from all kinds of religions and rituals (Hegarty & O'Mahony 1999). Elements of culture can be divided into two categories. The first one is observable elements, including observable characteristics of behaviour, food, language, social arrangement, material arts; and the second element is non-observable elements, such as beliefs, attitudes, values attained by most people in a society. (Sussmann & Rashcovsky 1997.) Furthermore, this category of element also includes role perceptions, stereotypes, categorizations, evaluations, expectations, memories, and opinion. People of the same culture share similar values, accustomed to the same rules and norms, build similar perceptions, attitudes and stereotypes, use a common language, and join the same activities. (Reisinger & Turner 2002, 40.)

According to Gavelek and Kong (2012), enculturation is "the process whereby individuals learn their group's culture through experience, observation, and instruction". Food plays a vital part in the process of enculturation. Food-related behaviours implemented by people born in a certain culture are called food habits, which can be seen from the methods and regulations that people apply on food. These food habits can be identified through various ways, from how the



food is chosen, purchased, distributed, to who prepares, serves and consumes (Kittler & Sucher 2004, as cited in Wijaya 2019). There is an array of factors that may affect those methods and regulations, such as natural resources, including climate, land, soil, water, fuel; belief, religion, education; communication, literacy; ethnicity, including ingenious or immigrants; technological advancement and colonization, as well as health condition and health care (Wahlqvist & Lee 2007, 2). Food contributes in building up the structure of the social relations between members of a community (Reynolds 1993), and acts as the assertion of cultural identity through symbolic meanings of rituals, traditions, and special events in a social group (Counihan & Esterik 2008). This means, each destination has identical food culture, proving that food can be an element to distinguish one culture from another. There are observable differences in cultures of every country, from the ingredients used in each dish, the way food is preserved, cooked, amount and portion for each dish, favourable and unfavourable taste, the way food is served, just to name a few. Furthermore, the utensils on dining tables, etiquettes and the way food is consumed also vary in different places. For example, in Asia, many countries use chopsticks, while in Europe, people use knives and forks. It's common for the young people to have some words towards older people before eating in several Asian countries, and the food is served all at once, whilst in Western countries, meals include three to five courses. Despite the differences, it is advisable for people travelling to other countries to learn the cross-cultural differences. As food occupies partly in shaping culture, it becomes important in the forming of individuals as well as a group's foodways. For individuals, food can indicate self-identity, self-expression, while for a larger group, food demonstrates the identities that can distinguish a destination from another. (Wijaya 2019.) Hence, to thoroughly understand the culture of a place, one cannot leave out their cuisine.

Aside from shaping traditions in different ways to make it more attractive to tourists and bring more opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and awareness, cuisine can also create, broaden the market for cultural practices, and induce attraction, affirmation to traditions and cultural groups (Long 2013). Each country has their own way of bringing food nearer to tourists through a variety of activities, such as food fair, festival, cooking class, food tour, just to

name a few. In some destinations such as the United States, food reflects history through centuries. The European colonization introduced European ingredients and cooking styles to the US. Later in the 20th century, the flow of immigrants from many foreign countries contributed to the rich diversity in food preparation throughout the nation. As people take their food culture along wherever they go, cuisine can act as a factor that encourages glocalization - the adaptation of global products to local forms. Food becoming a commodity also adjusts the relationship between the host and the guest. Consequently, it is not only the host offering guest's favourite dish, but also the host is operating a good business. (Long 2013.)

### 2.3.3 Economic Benefits

Tourism is one of the major global industries, plays a vital role in a destination's economy. Culinary tourism is a flourishing niche belonging to the industry, which is expected to grow considerably as it is becoming more recognized all over the world. It has been stated in many research that tourists spend almost one-third of their budget on food while travelling (Boyne, William & Hall, 2003; Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Quan & Wang, 2004). According to Hall (2012), in Scotland, whisky tourism is estimated to contribute £30.4 million to the country's economy in 2013, in which 86% of consumers are foreigners visiting Scotland. A survey published by Tourismus Analyse (2010, as cited in Beer, Ottenbacher & Harrington 2012) says that 86% of domestic tourists in Germany choose eating out as the top ranking for their tourist activity. Moreover, 72% of people visiting the UK were fond of local food and beverages during their stay, according to Enteleca Research and Consultancy (2000). It proves that a place can become a popular attraction to tourists with their distinctive food specialities.

Culinary tourism can generate more job opportunities and income, as well as create markets for particular foods and food events. As stated in a research carried out by Meler and Cerovic (2003), food and beverage expenditures take up nearly one-third of the overall tourist expenditure in the global tourism turnover. It is indicated that the diversified expressions of food could generate significant economic opportunities, which might support a variety of tourism and tourism-related businesses (Meler & Cerovic 2003; Henderson 2009, as cited in

Wijaya 2019; Wu 2010). Overall, food does not only raise tourist spending but also becomes one of the methods to extend the travel season and enhance the marketing sector for tourism (Everett & Aitchison 2008; Son & Xu 2013).

The link between tourism and local food production is inseparable. Richards (2002) argued that this strong connection could bring considerable added value. Each region has its local food which can be promoted to tourists. By this way, culinary tourism supports local food manufacturers and agricultural activities, ensuring that the food system, in general, is associated with and reinforcing local economies. This can be understood as the “multiplier effects”, in which business supplying and supporting the tourism industry benefit from tourism activities. For example, local farms produce vegetables and fruits to provide for restaurants, or food-related activities such as food fair, festival, so that tourists can have a taste of the local food and ingredients. As a result, tourists may be interested in the origin of the food, how it is made or grown, as this allows the access to cultural and historical heritage of the various cultures to make it more authentic. The growth in awareness about local food will result in an increase in demand for local food and ingredients. Manufactures focusing on locally produced food will benefit more from this, consequently, it will make consumption closer to production and eventually benefit the community's economy. Furthermore, companies, stakeholders cooperate together and partner with local farms to market their products instead of competing with each other. As a result, this cooperation can bring in more products and activities to offer tourists, therefore, increase destination attractiveness and give tourists more reasons to stay longer for the trip. (Long 2013.)

Another economic opportunity created by culinary tourism is that it creates a new perspective of marketing and branding for a destination, which can increase attractiveness and draw more tourists' attention without having to develop new extensive products. As mentioned before, food tourism is a subdivision of cultural tourism, making local food products belong to local culture. Thus, a destination which has a unique food culture will be more likely to take the lead in the tourism market with minimum marketing and product development. In the regional point of view, food tourism can be categorized into rural and urban experience (Okumus, Okumus & McKercher 2007). Urban experience provides tourists with

numerous food choices and tourism products, as well as many restaurants with quality services. On the other hand, rural experience is not as developed and well-recognized as urban experience. However, if the destination has an effective strategy to promote and market their food tourism product, they will have many potentials to broaden their market and gain more tourist attraction, which can benefit the local economy and in turns, increase the quality of local products due to growing demands. Higher satisfaction of food consumption from tourists causes higher return and recommendation rate, which can be gained if tourists experience food products (or related experiences in service, quality, uniqueness) that impress or give them memorable moments. Marketing can be a suitable method to achieve this (e.g. restaurant marketing campaign, travel brochure), or cooperative product development, which can be assisted and facilitated by local government. (Nwokorie 2015, 25.)

Food tourism is not only praised as a tool for regional economic development, strengthening local production, but also acts effectively as a means to enhancing sustainable tourism (Everett & Aitchison 2008; Sims 2009; Everett & Slocum 2013). Sustainability specifies the endurance of the resources used for one tourism. It contains both physical resources and economic resources. Tourists are also regarded as a kind of resource, because they are the reason businesses compete with each other, and business depends on tourists to survive. Furthermore, sustainable resources also involve local culture, traditions that bring more value to a destination, and the social stability of the host country, which is vital because it means a safer environment with less crime, friendlier interaction between tourists and local people, and employees with better skills for service industries in the tourism field. Four main areas that have resources needed to be sustainably controlled can be named as culture, economy, environment, and society. Basically, short-term benefits over time often domains long-term endurance of resources, especially when an unbalance in the local economy exists. Many factors and parties contribute to the impacts of cuisine on local economies, thus, issues surrounding culinary tourism are often difficult to resolve. (Long 2013.)

The use of food can directly or indirectly add value to various elements of sustainability in particular areas, such as encouraging and reinforcing agricultural

activity; preventing authentic exploitation and improving destination attractiveness, as shown in Figure 2. Moreover, food consumption and production can benefit the economy in ensuring the empowerment of the community by creating job opportunity and stimulating entrepreneurship; increasing pride regarding food, supporting marketing and brand identity of the destination focusing on food experience. (Telfer & Wall 1996.) On considering the role of food in destination's culture and economy discussed above, it is undeniable that food does not only provide numerous benefits but also acts as an indispensable factor in the sustainable development of areas it brings benefits to. Overall, local governments should stimulate tourism in general and culinary tourism, as well as foodservice businesses in order to boost the regional economy, generate revenues and job opportunities, improve destination's image and develop sustainable destinations (Rand, Heath & Alberts 2003).



Figure 2. Contribution of Local Food to Sustainable Development Within Destination (Rand, Heath & Alberts 2003)

#### 2.3.4 Community and Social Benefits

It has been discussed that food is a significant element in a human's life, it creates an impact on not only culture, economic, but also generates social interaction with communities. Food can be the method to build up the structure of social relationships among members of the society (Reynolds 1993) or a symbol of

social unity (Wijaya 2019). Food is more than the nourishment but means of communication that indicates social status, rituals, special occasions, and other social facts (Anderson 1988). Food is regarded as an effective tool to strengthen family bonding, enhance friendship, or create a comfortable atmosphere between people in the same or different group of the society. In terms of eating out, food represents lifestyles and aesthetic perspective of modern society (Beardsworth 1997 as cited in Wijaya 2019, 3). According to Chang (2007), people appreciate the social impact of food more than the quality food brings in. It is more likely that people dine out together during trips rather when they stay at home country, since it generates more social interaction between family members, friends, colleagues, and connection with new culture, local community and tourism personnel. For some people, food may play a role as the main entertainment that offers the most enjoyable activities. Being fully immersed in cuisine motivates travellers to seek relaxation, entertainment and escapism (Sparks, Bowen & Klag 2003). It provides an opportunity for visitors to discover the lifestyle of other communities by trying new food that is different from what they eat at home. Basically, when people try others' food, they will have a better understanding and appreciation towards each other. According to many research, one of the reasons tourists are keen on trying local food is because they want to show their food experiences to friends and family (Chang, Kivela & Mak 2010; Kim, Sun, Park & Peterson 2013; Pearce, Wu & Osmond 2013). As people tend to seek recognition and attention from others, therefore, trying unfamiliar food can be a method to distinguish oneself from others in terms of social status (Fields 2002). Thanks to advanced technology nowadays, people have various ways to share their moments and experiences. More and more people are sharing these experiences online through social media. As reported in a survey conducted by Xiao & Zhang (2013, as cited in Chen 2016, 55), 67% of Chinese people love taking pictures of the food before eating. Consequently, this trend creates an invisible connection among people of the same or different cultural groups. Overall, it is expected that by exposing to a novel culture, people have more awareness about the culture and people, which is beneficial in resolving cultural misunderstanding and conflicts.

Cuisine can be seen as a beneficial force to enhance the quality of food, increase food safety for a community. Since a majority of people are concerned about the hygiene of local food while travelling to an unfamiliar destination. They do not want to get sick and miss the chance to discover the place, therefore, hygiene becomes one of the priorities while choosing what and where to eat for many tourists. Due to this, food producers will be more aware of the food safety and food production development so that they can ensure tourists' satisfaction, enhance attractiveness for the destination and become more competitive in the tourism market. Consequently, this results in higher quality food for both local people and tourists. Culinary tourism may draw more attention to healthier ingredients, preparation styles and more sustainable production methods as many tourists nowadays are seeking organic and healthy food, helping the market for food that lacks attention or be ignored. Farmers or producers who are struggling to compete in the market may find more opportunities to develop. (Long 2013.)

Last but not least, food partly contributes to the empowerment of the community in terms of economics. As a result, local people gain more access to food, either by producing themselves or purchasing food by their income. Thus, the citizen's health can be more ensured with nutritious and safe food (Okech 2014, 6).

## 2.4 Culinary Tourist

### 2.4.1 Tourist Profile

Up until recent years, because the concern about culinary tourism has been increasing, related concepts surrounding it is also receiving more attention, including the definitions of the culinary tourists. According to the World Food Travel Association (2020), culinary tourists are "travellers who have participated in a food or beverage experience other than dining out, at some time in the past 12 months". WFTA has conducted the research PsychoCulinary Profiling to find out how food lovers differ in terms of various areas such as trendy, social, veggie, budget, innovative, or eclectic, just to name a few. In the past, the role of food was not regarded as important as it is nowadays, thus, there was not much research about the categorization of culinary tourists and the method to discover

the differences in various groups of tourist. Instead, tourists tend to be implicated as a whole group and appear with similar characteristics. As the significance of food is more and more recognized in modern days, several attempts have been made to categorize culinary tourists based on different criteria and characteristics. It is equally vital to distinguish the definitions of culinary tourist, which has been given above and the understanding of tourists who are involved in culinary tourism activities. The latter indicates people who only engage in culinary tourism activities while travelling and food does not act as the main motivator for them to travel. Furthermore, some of those definitions do not include people who are interested in wine tourism - the subset of culinary tourism. Smith (2001, as cited in Amherst, Hennessey & MacDonald 2011, 3) suggested that tourists who travel for the purpose of tasting or consuming only wine are distinct from those who fancy in local or regional food production or production in general.

As stated in the research conducted by Amherst, Hennessey & MacDonald (2011), tourists are divided into two categories based on two concepts. The first one is the degree of participation in culinary past experience as the main motivator, and the second is the behaviour towards activities related to food at home and while travelling. A culinary tourist is described as someone who is engaged in or motivated by food or culinary tourism activities such as visiting farms, markets, participating in country fair, food festivals, food fair, joining cooking class, just to name a few. Based on the definition, four segments were given and analysed, including deliberate, opportunistic, accidental, and uninterested culinary tourists. In the next paragraphs, how Amherst, Hennessey & MacDonald (2011) segment culinary tourists will be explained.

Deliberate culinary tourists are understood as “foodies” - people who have a strong fascination towards food and are motivated to travel by food. The second segment is opportunistic culinary tourists, defined as people who are deeply involved in food activities while travelling although cuisine is not their prime motivation. This segment has a similar participation rate in food activities as the first segment, however, they are distinguished by the motivation to travel. The third segment is accidental culinary tourists, defined as tourists who take part in culinary activities mostly by chance and have a lower participation rate than the other two segments which have been mentioned. Last but not least, uninterested



culinary tourists are people not engaged in any food-related activities while travelling. (Amherst, Hennessey & MacDonald 2011.)

The second type of culinary tourist is based on the behaviour, perception or knowledge, interest of tourists in food-related activities while they are at home or travelling, involving the criteria for studying: the importance of experience related to food at the destination, preference of local and organic foods, interest in beer or wine, interest in cooking, and the preference of familiar food and restaurant at the travel destination. Accordingly, three clusters were studied: culinary-balanced, culinary-oriented, and familiarity-oriented tourists. Culinary-balanced tourists show moderate attitude towards culinary activities, while culinary-oriented tourists have high scores of attitudes toward food behaviours and familiarity-oriented tourists are more likely to be engaged in familiar foods and restaurants at the destination. The result of the research supports a strong relationship between attitudes and behaviours, showing that culinary experiences at the destination are highly related to behavioural factors, including attitudes towards food-related activities, belief in the significance of cuisine at the destination, desire to taste local food for example. (Amherst, Hennessey & MacDonald 2011.)

This research has provided a way of segmentation for culinary tourists, which is beneficial for marketing, or identifying the target group of a destination. Each type of culinary tourist has detailed and reasonable definitions, supported by logical evidence and efficient methodology. However, this method is comparatively confusing, since the segmentation is based on two concepts, each concept contains clusters and segments; therefore, there are many elements to examine and look into when considering applying it in a market analysis of a destination.

Another approach of culinary segmentation is given by Hjalager (2003), based on Cohen's (1984) phenomenological categorization of tourist lifestyles. He divided tourist attitudes and preferences for food and beverages in the model of tourism and culinary lifestyles into four segments: recreational, existential, diversionary, and experimental culinary tourists. Various tourist-dining attitudes has been indicated in the model, which will be described in the following parts.

The first type is recreational culinary tourists, claimed to be the conservative type of tourist that have a preference for familiar food and beverages during the trip. They are highly involved in self-catering and recreational activities. They are likely to stay in secluded accommodation and bring ingredients with them so they can be independent in cooking. Recreational culinary tourists strongly respect family values and the act of eating together. They show little interest in fancy restaurants, expensive foods and dining ambience as well as service style does not affect their culinary experiences. These tourists have a low tendency of trying exotic food and culinary activities that require participation. (Hjalager 2003.)

As reported by Hjalager (2003), the existential culinary tourists are interested in the combination of food and beverage and eating experiences that support the learning of cuisine. They do not consume food merely as a fundamental daily demand of human beings, but also a method of gaining knowledge about local cuisines, beverages and culture of the destination. They are oblivious to typical restaurants, common food chains, or well-known restaurants. They prefer restaurants which are popular to local people and look for the ingenious food prepared with care and respect to the tradition. The existential culinary tourists are likely to refrain from expensive meals partly because of the price and the indulgent decoration of the dish. They are interested in visiting local farms and markets, or joining cooking class, taking part in activities that can bring them authentic experiences. Local products would be their first choice as gifts to bring home for friends and relatives. They seek information about culinary tourism mostly on the internet and travel-related literature and do not pay much attention to advertisements of travel agencies.

The third type of culinary tourist in Hjalager's model is diversionary culinary tourist. They are the kind of tourists that want to escape from ordinary life including day to day shopping and cooking for the family. These tourists are not picky, on the contrary, they can easily find food anywhere such as a food chain restaurant, food stall. For them, the quantity of food or beverage is more important than quality. Similar to recreational culinary tourists, diversionary culinary tourists are not into trying exotic food, and they regard food as a method to bond with friends or acquaintances and in the meantime enjoy life. Therefore, they tend to choose unsophisticated food and rustic restaurants, where they are full of talking

and laughing, staff's service is casual and there is no restriction on behaviour and dress code. Furthermore, they are likely to ask for advice from a travel agent, rely on a tour guide and travel brochure for information. (Hjalager 2003.)

Last but not least, the experimental culinary tourists consider food and beverages as a way to symbolize their lifestyles. These tourists can be known as "foodies" who always seek trendy or popular cafés and restaurants with creative menus and exceptional service. The experimental culinary tourists are up to date about the latest food trends, ingredients, recipes. They are actively experimenting with new recipes and new ways of eating and preparing food. Food and beverages partly form their images, and somehow express their lifestyles. To them, the quality and sophistication in cuisine play an important part in life, being one of the major concerns. Holiday souvenirs they would likely purchase can include cookbooks, designed glassware, porcelain, cutlery, or kitchen gadgets. (Hjalager 2003.)

Two research have different approaches to categorize culinary tourists. However, the results of the research are beneficial to later researchers and people working in the tourism field. Segmenting culinary tourists is valuable in identifying the target group of a destination and assessing the suitable marketing strategies to attract more tourists. Furthermore, acknowledging the characteristics of each type of culinary tourist can support the development of culinary tourism products so that they meet the demand of the right type of tourist, which in the end can enhance tourist experience and develop culinary tourism of the destination.

#### 2.4.2 Factors Affecting Choice of Food and Destination

Regarding the consumption of food by the tourist, many research have been conducted to examine the factors affecting the choice of food. Mak, Lumbers, Eves and Chang (2012) claimed that it depends on five factors: 1) Cultural and religious factors; 2) Socio-demographic factors; 3) Motivational factors; 4) Personality; and 5) Previous experience. On the other hand, Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009, 429) proposed a model of consumption that contains three main factors divided into several sub-factors: Motivational factors (i.e. exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic

experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, and physical environment; demographic factors (i.e. gender, age, and education); and physiological factors (i.e. food neophilia and food neophobia) (Figure 3). This model illustrates the segmentation of factors influencing the food choices and preferences of culinary tourists, based on the perspectives of Khan (1981), combining biological, social, and psychological impacts (Kim, Eves & Scarles 2009). Regarding the purpose of this research, only motivational factors and demographic factors will be explained.

Many studies have pointed out that motivational factors put a considerable impact on tourists' gastronomic behaviour and local food plays a major role in the overall satisfaction of a trip (Cetin & Bilgihan 2016). According to Fields (2002), there are four motivational factors that influence the tourist's choice of food or eating places: physical, cultural, interpersonal and status factors. On the other hand, Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009) present nine sub-factors that build up the motivational factor: exciting experience; escape from routine; concern for health; discovering new things; authentic experience; fellowship; prestige; sensorial and physical attraction in their proposed model of gastronomic consumption.

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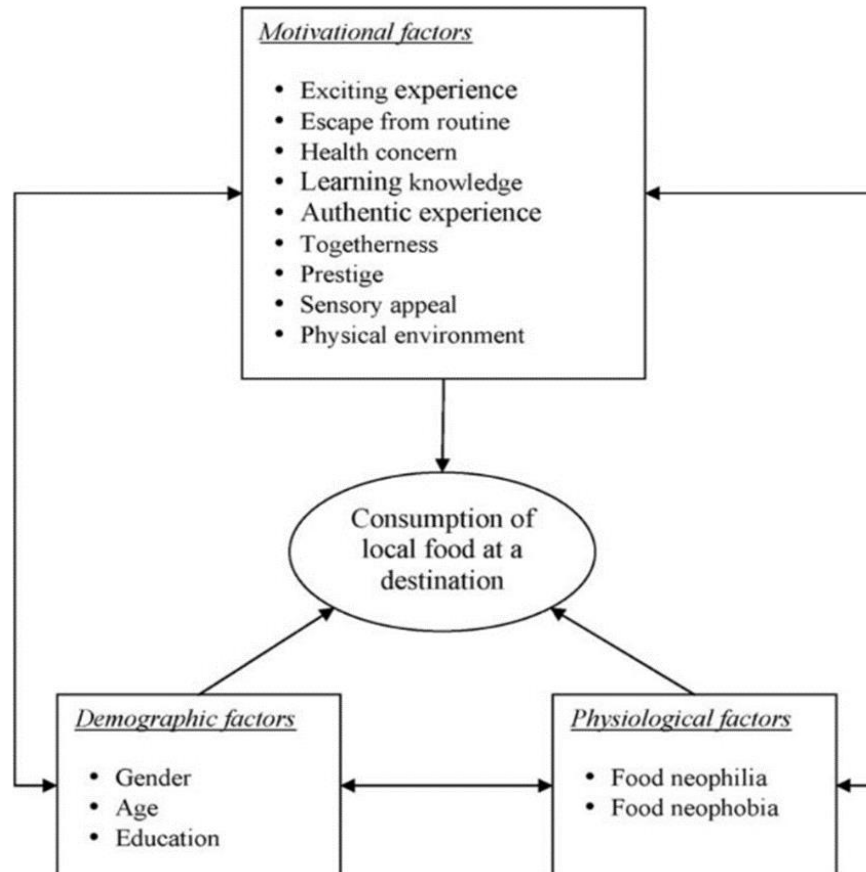


Figure 3. Proposed Model of Local Food Consumption at Holiday Destinations (Kim, Eves & Scarles 2009, 429)

According to their study, many people have mentioned that trying local foods which they have not tasted or seen before is an exciting experience. Accordingly, curiosity about the taste of the food or feeling of excitement can stimulate the need to try local food and beverages, making it one of the key reasons for eating out during trips. Another sub-factor has also been explained in several studies is the escape from routine, which is related to the diversionary culinary tourist type described before. For example, people at middle-class yearn to try inexpensive, roadside food while the lower middle class might want to experience fancy meals in high-class restaurants. Passariello (1983) suggested that tourists look for the role-reversal experiences, including eating, during a holiday that they hardly have in everyday life. Health concern can be considered as a central motivational factor that decides tourists' choices of food. The relationship between food and health concern is undeniable and creates effects on each other during culinary experiences of tourists. According to Mooney and Walbourn (2001), people would

avoid food relating to their worries about weight, health, and unnatural ingredients. Regarding tourists' demands these years, more and more people refer to organic foods not only in their daily life but also during travel. One more important motivational factor is the knowledge about the cuisine of a destination gained after the trip. It is believed that by tasting local cuisine, people can enhance and enrich their intellectual taste. Cultural motivators can stimulate visitors to learn about and experience the host culture, consequently, they will get more insight about and intimate feeling towards the destination. Authentic experiences also play a vital role in tourist's food choices. This can be explained by the differences in ingredients, cooking methods, and preservation food among countries. Uniqueness and originality in local cuisine can be seen as preferences of tourists while travelling. (Kim, Eves & Scarles 2009.) As mentioned before, food can act as a means of strengthening the bonds between relatives, friends, or creating opportunities to meet more people. Prestige is also a motivational factor affecting culinary tourism. Kim, Eves, Scarles (2009) have reported that local food experiences have a role in ego-enhancement or self-satisfaction, people seek attention and recognition by showing friends and relatives their culinary experiences. Meanwhile, experiences such as trying exotic food or dining at trendy restaurants can be considered as a way to claim an individual's social status. Sensory appear and physical environment are also reported in the proposed model as a factor leading tourists to their food choice. It is obvious that smell, taste and visual image of the food are basic standards to evaluate culinary experience. Yuksel & Yuksel (2003) claimed that physical environment of a restaurant including factors such as cleanness or ambience (the setting of furniture, background music, decoration) also decide whether the guest enjoys or satisfies with the food experiences.

By and large, demographic factors have been studied and considered as important aspects that influence tourists' choice of where and what to eat. Factors such as age, gender, level of education, marital status, religious beliefs, are claimed to be the key factors affecting tourists' food choice (Cho et al. 2017; Kim, Lee & Klenosky 2013). According to Kivela and Crotts (2005), tourists' choices regarding culinary experiences while travelling depends partly on where they come from. For example, it has been reported that Eastern people are not likely

to dine out in restaurants serving local food, whereas people from Western countries are fonder of trying exotic foods which are different from what they eat at home (Tse & Crofts 2005).

With regards to gender, it was stated in the research of Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009) that women were more likely to be keen on trying local food and fascinated with food experiences during their travel. The behaviour towards the consumption of food between men and women can be different (Flynn, Slovic & Mertz 1994). Women concern about food safety and price as a priority while choosing food, on the other hand, men regard the taste as the key factor in food purchase. It is likely that women show more interest in health issues such as diet, balance in nutrition, organic food, and food hygiene than men. (Kim, Eves & Scarles 2009.) This impacts considerably the decision of where and what to eat between men and women.

In addition, it is believed that people with better economic status and a higher education level are more likely to be fond of local cuisine and regard it as an important factor in travel decision, as food is not merely consumed to satisfy hunger, but is also associated with local culture (Wadolowska, Babicz-Zelinska & Czarnocinska 2008). Sharing the same opinion, researchers such as López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares (2012), Pérez-Gálvez, López-Guzmán, Buiza and Medina-Viruel (2017) or Tsai (2016) reported that tourists' levels of age and education are closely linked to their choice of cuisine (Daries-Ramon, Cristobal, Ferrer-Rosell & Marine-Roig 2018, 335).

### 3 CULINARY TOURISM IN VIETNAM

#### 3.1 Commissioner – ScandiVina Vietnam Tour

The commissioner of this thesis project is ScandiVina Trading Communications and Tourism Service Company, commonly known with the shorter brand name “ScandiVina Vietnam Tour” (SVT). Founded in 2009 by Lan Nguyen and Huong Pham, the company is richly experienced in offering high-quality tourism products and services across plenty of regions in Vietnam. The services provided by SVT vary from inbound and domestic package tours, accommodation booking assistance, 24/7 transfers and airport pickups, transportation bookings (including flight, train, ferry, or coach tickets). The company also takes care of visa issues and other required travel documentation for clients. In order to meet the diverse demands of travellers nowadays, SVT also designs tailor-made programs that suit their travelling styles or serve any specific interests if requested by clients. Within the last few years, they have begun to organize M.I.C.E (meeting, incentive, conference, and exhibition) tours for some business travel groups. This indicates that the company has a potential capacity to work on novel themes and concepts. (ScandiVina Vietnam Tour 2020.)

The company’s business idea is introducing Vietnamese culture to international visitors through their stories. Their main goal is to be one of the top agencies in the city that customers will put at the top of their priority list when selecting a place to entrust their travel demands. The mission statement declared by the company is “We do everything to make your travelling time in Vietnam most convenient and enjoyable” (ScandiVina Vietnam Tour 2020). Together with the vision to spread the image of Vietnam worldwide, they are committed to enhancing the quality of their services constantly to satisfy a vast variety of customer groups and leave good impressions on tourists after returning home from their trips. With over-10-year experience in the tourism sector, the team has been growing stably with an in-depth understanding of local destinations and cooperation with regional stakeholders at different levels. (Nguyen 2020.)

Besides receiving a remarkable number of domestic customers, the company also works with many inbound tourists who are mainly from India and



Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden and Finland. With the intention of exploiting some niche travel markets for new experience development, SVT is also taking the concept of culinary tourism into account. Until now, they have yet to provide any programs or packages exclusively customized for this field. (Nguyen 2020.) Therefore, this thesis project can serve as a reference material that helps to put forward some recommendations on their development ideas in the near future.

### 3.2 Tourism Growth in Vietnam

Tourism sector acts as one of the most important pillars in the development of Vietnam's economy. In the past decades, Vietnam has witnessed a tourism boom, becoming one of the most popular destinations in South East Asia. Vietnam has taken advantage of the growing global and regional demand, managed to take up the market share with Southeast Asian competitors. Vietnam has gained a peak increase in both international and domestic visitors. (The World Bank 2019.) In 2018, the number of total international arrivals reached over 15.4 million, an increase of 20% compared to the number in 2017 (VNAOT 2020).

The income generated from the tourists has created more job opportunities and rising revenues for people working in the tourism sector in Vietnam. By 2017, tourism occupied 8 percent of Vietnam's GDP (including contribution from indirect multiplier effects and became the country's single largest services export. (The World Bank 2019.) It results in an increase in living standard for local people. Moreover, Vietnam has a diverse culture with 54 ethnic groups, among which 50 minority groups living on the highland or mountainous areas, maintaining their distinctive traditions within their communities and passing down for generations. Tourists visiting these regions bring lots of benefits for the local people, such as generating income, directly supporting the upgrading of local infrastructure, facilities, and spreading their culture to another group of community. By purchasing their handicrafts and using local services, tourists partly contribute to the conservation of culture.

However, the rapid growth in tourism also creates unfavourable effects to society in terms of economy, environment, and local culture. An increase in the demands for goods and services in the tourism industry often creates a rise in prices for local people. It also happens that tourists are being overcharged by many retailers, which leaves a bad impression for tourists when coming to Vietnam. Furthermore, nature-based tourism brings considerable benefits to the destination, however, it has also put pressure on the environment, especially in recent years, Vietnam is witnessing a large number of tourists visiting. Issues such as lacking awareness, littering and other types of pollution act as the cause of environmental deterioration and loss of natural diversity. Even though Vietnam is famous for having many outstanding natural sights, the country is now facing issues related to maintaining natural resources and environmental health standards. Environmental issues can be seen in big cities which attract tourists such as Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Nha Trang. The act of being exposed to different cultures can more or less affect the cultural values of the community. Despite the fact that local people can earn various benefits from tourism, they can become too dependent on it that they do not take part in other community activities. (Itourvn 2019.)

Due to the rapid growth in tourism, many big and popular cities in Vietnam suffer from over-tourism, which exposes the vulnerable infrastructure capacity, human resources in the sector, and tourism sustainability. If not well handled, these weaknesses can affect economics, degrade natural and cultural tourism resources or harm local communities since the benefits cannot exceed the investment costs. To maintain the long-term sustainable tourism, strategic choices should be created based on the suitable pace, composition, geographic balance of its future growth, follow policy measures and investment in different areas. The major priorities can include developing management of destination planning and product development, diversifying tourism products and expanding markets, improving work skills, strengthening local tourism chain linkages, upgrading infrastructure capacity and quality of the destination while protecting local environment and culture. (The World Bank 2019.)

In order to push tourism growth in Vietnam as a major source of economic growth and attract more international arrivals, in early 2011, Vietnamese government

composed the “Strategy on Vietnam’s tourism development until 2020, vision to 2030”. The plan concentrates on training professionals, developing and extending market, branding, improving infrastructure, developing tourism products and services with local cultural characteristics. In 2017, the Prime Minister decided to spend US\$ 1.32 billion on developing tourism and transport infrastructure at important tourist destinations, in which poor provinces will have priority as the majority of their budget does not meet the requirements of investment for infrastructure development. Furthermore, the government also provided funds for promoting activities and making plans. Besides that, the government changed visa policies for international visitors by allowing tourists from 46 countries to enter Vietnam for 30 days with a single-entry electronic visa until 2021. (Nguyen 2019.)

### 3.3 Vietnamese Cuisine as Destination Attraction

In recent years, the model of culinary tourism has been popularized in the leading destinations within Vietnam including Hanoi, Hoi An, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh city (Nhan Dan 2019). Culinary events are organized for tourists on a yearly basis, some of which have earned a great deal of media attention such as Food Festival of the South, Southern Fruit Festival and International Food Festival (VietNamNet 2017). Thanks to the government’s attempts to promote gastronomic tourism during the last few years, Vietnamese cuisine has raised its reputation worldwide. For instance, some traditional dishes such as Bun Cha (known as fresh rice vermicelli and grilled pork) and Nem (fried spring rolls) have acquired international recognition since they received beautiful compliments from Barack Obama – the 44th president of the United States during his trip to Vietnam in 2006 (Viet Nam News 2016). Many renowned chefs from different places in the world are also captivated by the attractiveness of Vietnamese cuisine, some of whom are Didier Corlou, Bobby Chinn, Martin Yan and Robert Danhi. For that reason, they made the decision to visit Vietnam in order to experience traditional dishes in person as well as to discover the beauty of Vietnamese culinary arts. (Nhan Dan 2014.)

In enormous attempts to make Vietnamese cuisine become attractive tourism products, the Department of Tourism in Hanoi has been arranging multiple

programs all year round, namely street food carnivals taking place from time to time in the city centre, or traditional events highlighting food in craft villages. Through these events, the city has successfully presented Vietnamese culinary arts to foreign tourists and reinforced cultural exchange with plenty of meaningful activities. (Viet Nam News 2016.) The Vietnam Chef Association (VCA) was founded in 2017, as a part of the Vietnam Tourism Association, aiming at inviting gifted chefs across different regions of the country to join for cooperation. The key objectives of VCA are to conserve traditional cuisine by carrying out important development projects, which marked a positive movement in the connection between tourism and culinary system, creating more opportunities for Vietnamese gastronomic tourism to bloom. Quan Nguyen – the head of VCA affirmed the goal to develop traditional cuisine into a high-quality tourism product and to help talented people to make a name for themselves by showing their exceptional cooking ability in various programs including food festivals, demonstrations, and competitions. These culinary experts, who are primarily working in the hospitality industry, are recognized as essential catalysts for the growth of culinary tourism. (Nhan Dan 2018.) With a view to boosting culinary tourism, local authorities actively implement marketing strategies via social media and launch a wide range of events from cuisine fairs, exhibitions to cooking contests. This is regarded as a good opportunity to introduce traditional dishes, talented chefs and food ambassadors to international visitors. (VIETNAMNET 2017.)

Apart from growing opportunities in big cities, some parts of Vietnam have been encountering several challenges in the process of constructing products for culinary tourism. Some regions face the dilemma of lacking investment funds for implementing development activities despite owning profuse resources of food and beverage. In addition, a great number of people currently working in the tourism industry have limited understanding of the culinary industry, which leads to difficulties in introducing special food products to travellers. Meanwhile, this tourism model demands tour developers and especially guides to acquire broad knowledge about cuisine and foodways so that meaningful experiences can be fully delivered to tourists. (Nhan Dan 2018.)

Challenging as the current situation seems, it is positively asserted that Vietnam stands a good chance of developing food tourism in the next few years. Experts have suggested spreading the practices of farm-to-table throughout the sector, as agriculture is one of the most remarkable strengths that the country has. The farm-to-table concept is believed to be a healthy alternative for tourists, as it targets at supplying organic food and drinks that contain higher values in terms of nutrition compared to processed ones widely available in supermarkets. Dining at local venues where ingredients are directly obtained from farms or vineyards, customers not only enjoy unique, authentic food served on the table but also possibly gain insights into the farming routines of the host. Moreover, the adoption of farm-to-table is also beneficial to the growth of the local economy since it supports production activities carried out by small and private enterprises. (Nhan Dan 2019.)

Vietnamese cuisine and culture have always shared an inextricable bond. In each traditional dish, tourists can relish in the taste of this country's rich culture and history – a feature that not only creates a memorable culinary experience but also serves as a quintessence of Vietnamese cuisine. President of Culinary Council in Vietnam, Nguyen Thuong Quan, remarks that Vietnamese cuisine prides itself on the perfect harmony of fat, fibre, and protein. The delicacy and richness in the nutrition of the country's food also makes a strong impression on any foreigners who come to visit it. Vietnamese food courts in festivals promoting culinary tourism and culture held overseas usually attract native people and international friends coming to discover the taste. The fact that foreigners love and become fascinated in Vietnamese cuisine is one of the most effective methods to promote Vietnamese's culinary tourism to the world. Vice President of VNAT, Binh Vu stated that tourism has competitive characteristics thanks to tourism products. High quality and appealing products attribute efficiently in the development of tourism, in which culinary tourism acts as an important sector. Vietnamese cuisine has its own charm, uniqueness and is receiving interest from international friends. Vietnamese enticing dishes has impressed tourists and are being spread throughout the world. It proved that Vietnamese cuisine is unquestionably able to become unique and engaging tourism products. (Thanh 2020.)

## 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Methods Used

The research is practised-based, focusing on the development of culinary tourism experience for inbound tourists in Vietnam. Methodologies carried out for the research are expected to include mixed methods

By carrying out surveys and semi-interviews simultaneously, the research can obtain more perspectives and various points of view, which consequently, will be beneficial for the results of the research. Each approach has a distinctive advantage when applied in the process. Furthermore, using both methods provides more viewpoints to look into and discuss, bringing out more possible key results and reliabilities for the research.

### 4.2 Qualitative Approach

The aim of qualitative research is to comprehend individuals' experiences, cultures or a specific situation in a "humanistic, interpretive approach". This method consists of all types of social enquiry interpreting non-numeric data into words. In other words, it encompasses various means of analysing text: "content, conversation, discourse, narrative" analysis, to name but a few. With a view to exploring the deep-rooted meaning of human behaviours, the qualitative approach focuses on depicting the fundamental aspects of human beings' experiences or a circumstance. (Jackson, Drummond & Camara 2007, 23.) Qualitative research is considered as an inductive method, as it involves drawing general conclusions based on the data retrieved from the observation of an individual or small group. This method can be conducted under a variety of forms such as interviews, participant observation, content analysis, focus group, case studies, action research, documentary, visual techniques. (Jennings 2010, as cited in Tekoniemi-Selkälä 2020.)

For qualitative approach used in the thesis project, two semi-structured interviews were arranged, one of which was with the travel manager of the commissioned company while the other was with a representative from the inbound travel agency Sens Asia Travel. Semi-structured interview refers to a method of

gathering detailed information through a conversational discussion that covers themed topics and standardized questions. The orders in which they are provided can be changed during the interview since the interviewer may find an answer interesting and come up with new questions relevant to the topic. (Harrell & Bradley 2009, 27.) The reason for adopting this category of interview is that its flexibility and improvisation allows the conversation to occur in a natural but still controlled manner. Through some spontaneous questions, both interviewers and interviewee can express personal opinions straightforward and truthfully.

The interviews asked basic information about the companies, opinions of the stakeholders towards the potential development of Vietnamese culinary tourism through the brief evaluation of current opportunities and challenges. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked about their culinary product, the possibility of producing more food-based products and their future plan related to culinary matter in the near future. From this interview, the understanding of culinary tourism of experienced stakeholders was collected and analysed to evaluate the practicality, possible opportunities and challenges that a travel agency might face when applying new food-based products.

### 4.3 Electronic Survey

In this project, an electronic survey is adopted in the same period with a semi-structured interview. It is an instrument that assists systematical and standardized data collection from individuals. Questionnaires are used in surveys which delivers identical questions in the same manner to every participant. The purpose of surveys is to evaluate the needs and assess the results or effects of a process or program by gathering multiple responses that may reflect respondents' different points of view, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, actions. There are several ways to carry out this procedure such as mail, telephone, and handout, face-to-face or electronic surveys. (Taylor-Powell and Hermann 2000, 3.)

For the thesis project, electronic surveys are selected as they allow flexible and convenient interaction with international respondents regardless of differences in their time zone and geographical location (Taylor-Powell and Hermann 2000, 6). Therefore, compared to other survey types, electronic alternative seems more

time-saving and cost-effective at the same time. In addition, concerning the outbreak situation of Coronavirus pandemic when people are highly recommended to stay home, e-surveys has become an appropriate choice to collect data in place of the ones requiring face-to-face communication.

At the initial steps of the methodology process, a Google survey was created and shared on different Facebook groups about travelling to Vietnam. The questionnaire contains questions about traveller's typology, eating behaviour while travelling of inbound tourists, their understanding, expectation and experiences related to culinary tourism. Questions used in the survey include closed-ended, multiple choices, contingency, matrix and open-ended forms.

The target group of the questionnaire was international tourists at the age of 18-50, who have travelled to Vietnam at least once. The expected number of respondents was between 100 and 150, since getting contact with the respondent might be difficult due to the pandemic situation. Through this survey, different opinions towards food matters in culinary tourism in Vietnam were collected, studied and used in the process of evaluating methods to develop culinary tourism product experience in Vietnam.

#### 4.4 Reliability, Validity and Ethical Considerations

Reliability refers to whether a research methodology will produce the same results when it is carried out again to the identical sample of subjects in a different time (Veal 1992, 46). For this thesis, the level of reliability was measured through two phases of the survey process. First, in order to make sure that participants' opinions are consistent, a few questions expected to yield the analogous answers from each respondent were slightly changed in the form of asking. Second, the same group was requested to retake the survey after a fortnight so that the latest results could be compared with original ones with a view to checking the stability of the research findings over a short period of time.

According to Field (2005, as cited in Taherdoost 2016, 28), validity "measures what is intended to be measured". In other words, it indicates to what extent the findings could respond to the research questions (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005). Validity is classified into four main types, which are all fulfilled in this paper. The



first category is face validity, which is shown in the appropriate appearance of the survey. Specifically, the survey has attempted to meet the standard regarding comprehensibility, formal style and formatting, language transparency (Taherdoost 2016, 29). More importantly, the survey was sent to the supervisor for feedback and modifications before being published to the public.

The thesis project has content validity as it follows the route to measure the targeted behaviours (Taherdoost 2016, 30). The research aimed to investigate the perspectives of inbound travellers towards culinary tourism experiences during their travel to Vietnam. Therefore, the first chapters covered theoretical framework that provided in-depth knowledge relevant to the topic. High-quality sources including books, scientific journals and conventional articles were used to reflect the literature in the paper. Followed by this, the research proceeded with qualitative and quantitative methodology. At the end of the process, main findings obtained from those methods as well as analysis of data clarified the research issue, which added to the content validity of the paper.

Construct validity is defined as the degree to which a theory, idea or behaviour is interpreted and applied to pragmatic operation in real life (Taherdoost 2016, 31). This aspect was also taken into great account in this project. As a result, theoretical sections provided the foundation for fundamental analysis that was used to outline questionnaires in both interview and survey.

Another type of validity that the paper concerns is criterion validity, which refers to how well a measure could support or anticipate the result for a different measure (Taherdoost 2016, 32). This is regarded as an evaluation tool conducive to forecast the work outcomes in a distinctive date which can vary from the past to the future. To achieve criterion validity, the paper indicated the suggestion for development solutions based on the main findings and data analysis in the end.

Last but not least, ethical principles were also taken into consideration while implementing the methodology. First of all, the survey was posted on some social platforms; thus, participation was non-compulsory. It means these group members could decide whether to take the survey or not of their own accord. All the answers were kept confidential, anonymous and they were not used for any purposes other than this thesis project. The respondents had the privilege to gain

access to research findings if they wish to. As regards the interviews, invitation letters were sent to both stakeholders at the beginning of the process. They were also informed of their right to refuse to participate in the research. The process continued after both stakeholders had confirmed their agreement to take part in the interview. Before the interview, the stakeholders were notified that they would be able to reject answering any question unless they wanted to reveal. In order to protect the confidentiality of those companies as well as to express our respect for their personal rights, the information provided was only used once they permitted. Moreover, every stage of the procedure was carried out based on the three following criteria: truthfulness, integrity and accuracy (Tekoniemi-Selkälä 2020).

## 5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Survey Results

#### 5.1.1 Demographic Factors of Respondents

The first criteria being researched are demographic factors of respondents participating in the questionnaire, including gender, age, and marital status, nationality, occupational status. Figure 4 shows the gender and age distribution of the respondents.

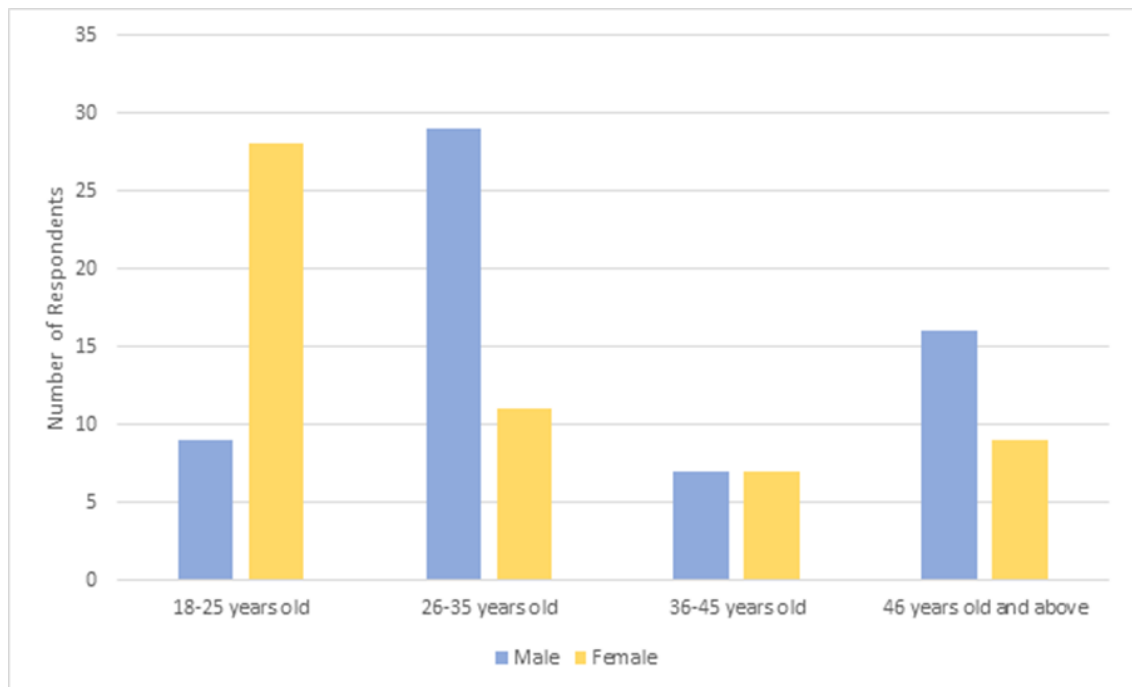


Figure 4. Gender and age distribution of respondents (N=116)

The respondents were classified into 4 age groups: 18–25 years old, 26–35 years old, 36–45 years old, and 46 years old and above. The majority of respondents were in the group of people from 26–35 years old, and the second large age group was 18–25 years old. It can be explained that because the survey was sent online on Facebook – the popular social media channel among people at this age. As can be seen from the graph, people from 36–45 years old had the least answers (14). Overall, the number of male respondents outnumbered that of female respondents by 6.

It was obvious that the majority of the respondents was single, while married people occupied 22%, and the others took up 13%. This result was understandable since most of the respondents were from 18 to 35 years old.

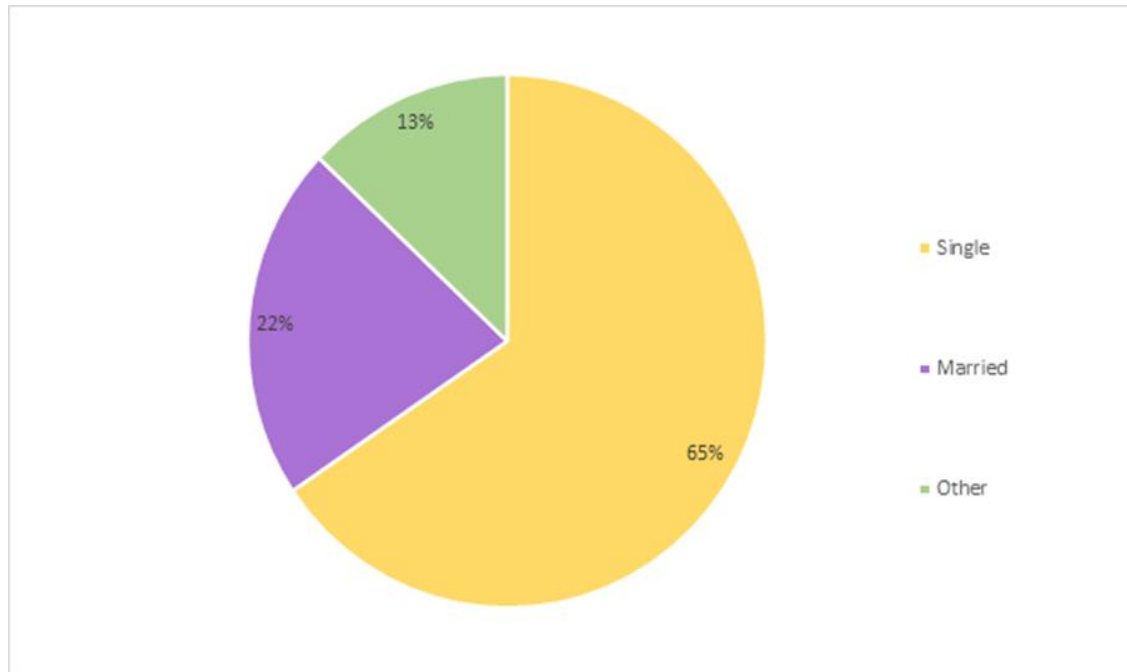


Figure 5. Marital status of respondents (N=116)

It can be seen in Figure 6 in the next page that 54% of the people participating in the survey were students, while the number of employed people followed with 32%, and just 5% of the respondents were retired. Out of 116, only 6 people answered that they were retired. The reason for the low number of elderly participating can be because people at old age are not familiar with Facebook or not interested in doing online surveys. Moreover, the elderly may find culinary tourism a novel concept or have not experienced any type of culinary product or services before.

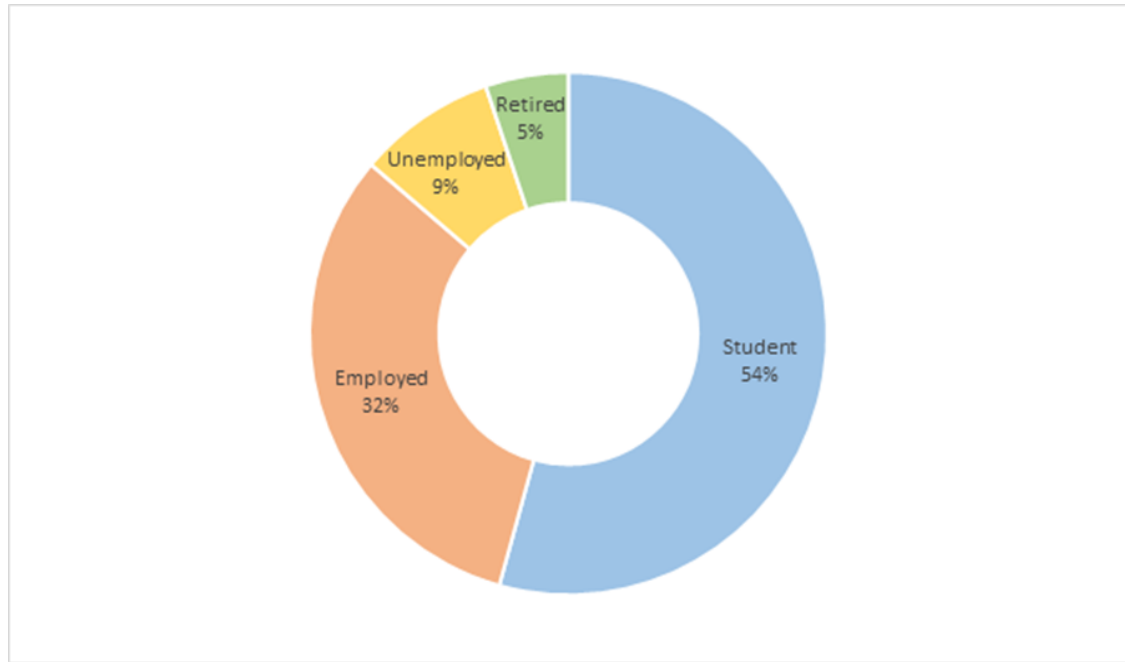


Figure 6. Occupational status of respondents (N=116)

Figure 7 below illustrates the respondents' nationalities, from which the research can draw out the interest and concern about culinary tourism of foreigners according to their nationality. A total of 32 countries appeared in the answer. Of all these countries, the USA is the one that had the most respondents (22), UK and South Korea came in second with 9 people, while Australia became the third with 8 answers.

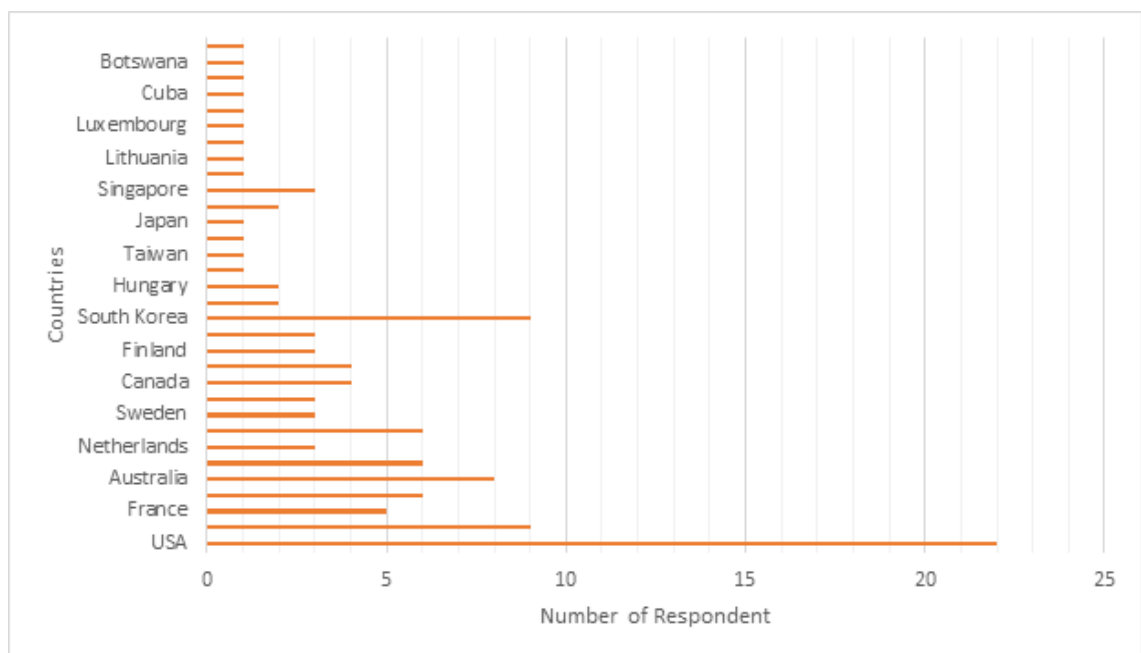


Figure 7. Nationalities of respondents (N=116)

Some countries in Asia such as Thailand, China, Singapore and many countries from Europe such as France, the Netherlands, and Finland also had people experienced Vietnamese culinary products and showed interest in the survey. The majority of the answers belonged to people from the USA and UK since the survey was posted on several Facebook groups of expatriates in Vietnam, and Vietnam has a large number of expatriates from these countries coming to reside and make a living. These recent years have witnessed a flow of Korean people visiting Vietnam for the purpose of leisure and business since Vietnam is becoming a popular destination to Korean due to the low price of tourism products and services, as well as many beautiful natural sceneries. According to Park Jong Sun, the head of Korea Tourism Organization Vietnam, well-known tourist destinations such as Ha Long, Hanoi, Da Nang, Hoi An and Phu Quoc, are much loved by Korean people, especially middle-aged tourists (Vietnam Insider 2019). As shown in the result of the survey, most of the respondents from South Korea were middle-aged and expressed great interest in Vietnamese cuisine and satisfaction with their stay in Vietnam. Furthermore, thanks to the strengthened bond of South Korea and Vietnam in terms of cultural integration, many activities were held with the view to boosting mutual development in tourism of two countries. Besides Korea, Vietnam is also a popular destination for other Asian and European countries, as shown in Figure 7.

#### 5.1.2 Travel Typology of Respondents

To analyse the travel typology of the respondents while visiting Vietnam, people who took part in the survey were asked about the sources they used to seek information for planning their trip, the amount of expense they intended to spend on food and beverages during a holiday, and if food and drink affected their travel decision.

The bar chart illustrates the sources used by respondents while planning a trip. According to Figure 8, the most common sources were the Internet, with 106 answers; suggestions from family or friends, relatives (70); and previous experience (31). These methods for seeking information belong to the category existential culinary tourists, which have been mentioned in the previous chapter. According to the information about the age groups of the respondents, people

using those three methods as the main source were from 18–35 years old, who were familiar and comfortable with modern technology. Interestingly, the least common sources such as TV, newspaper, brochure, and travel books were mostly chosen by the elderly, who preferred traditional sources of information. This trait fits the description of a diversionary culinary tourist. As observed in the results, female tourists were more likely to look for information from brochures or travel agencies, while the males preferred sources such as the Internet and suggestions from friends, family, relatives.

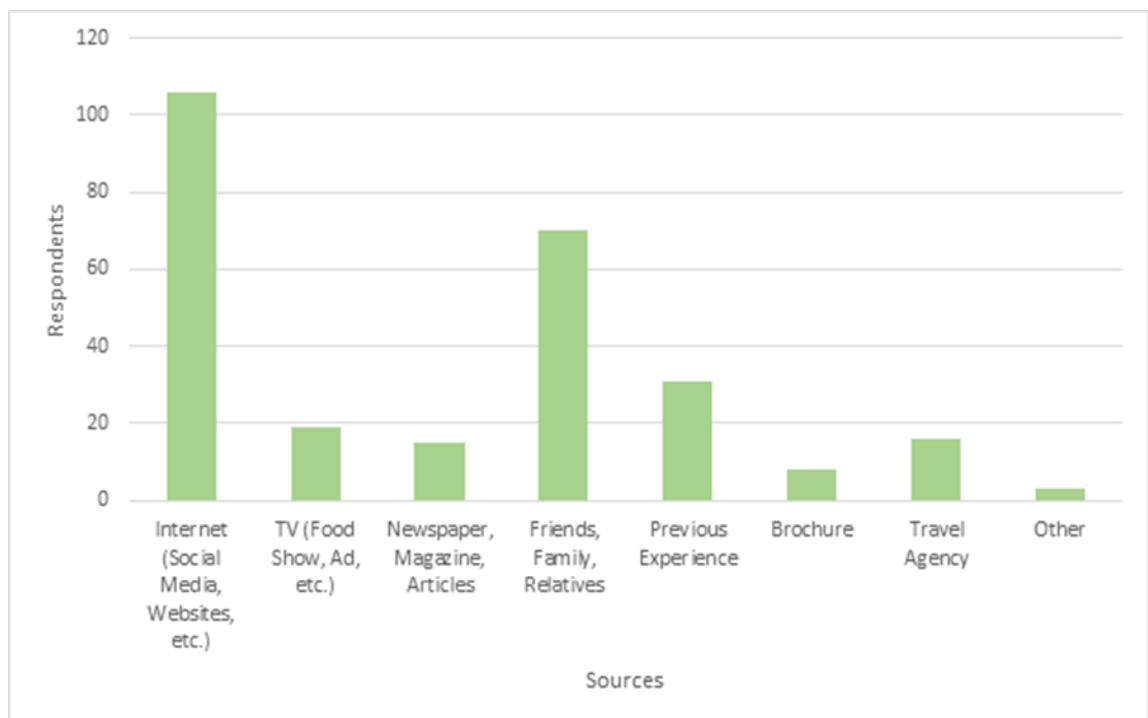


Figure 8. Sources used by respondents for planning trip (N=116)

Figure 9 in the next page illustrates that 69% of the respondents regarded local cuisine as a factor affecting their travel decision, while 31% of the respondents answered that food was not the factor that decides they should travel to the destination or not. As reported in the survey result, people who belonged to the second group were mostly motivated to travel by working or studying, therefore, food may not act as a priority factor in this case. There were many respondents in this group unacquainted with the concept “culinary tourism”, and some reported that they had not thought about trying local food or had not heard about Vietnamese cuisine, especially the elderly tourists. It shows that Vietnamese culinary tourism may still be a new concept to elderly customers, and there should

be more marketing campaigns designed for this target group so that Vietnamese cuisine can gain more awareness in the future.

I had no chance to experience the culinary tourism. I would go for it if I knew this. (R4)

Maybe travel agents could advertise them more. Otherwise, I do not know. (R68)

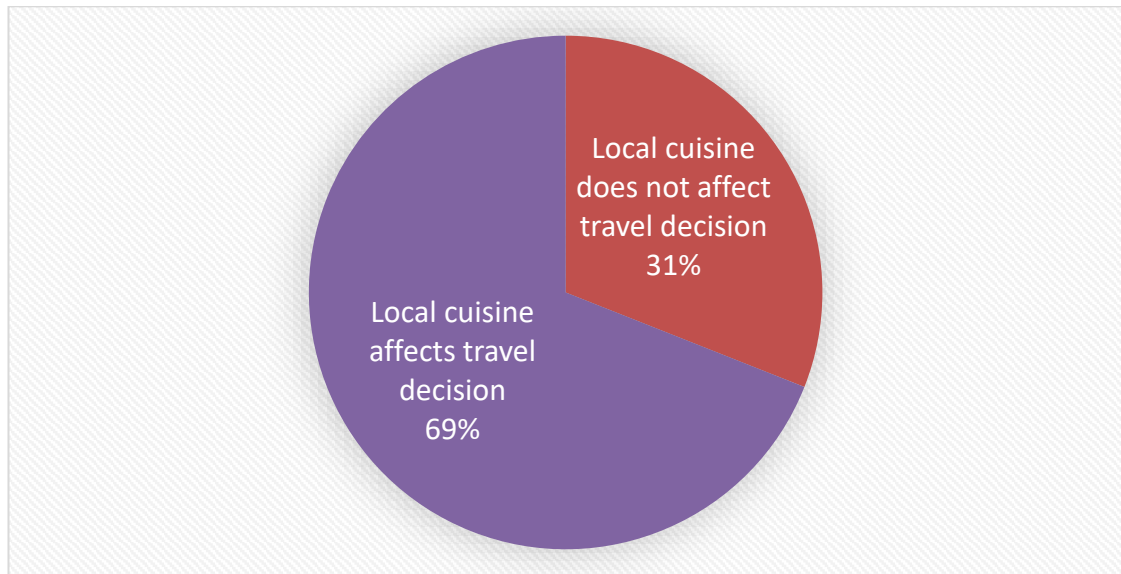


Figure 9. Effect of local cuisine on travel decision (N=116)

Figure 10 in the following page shows that the percentages of travel expenses spent on food and beverages by the respondents are shown. It can be seen that 47% of the respondents spent from 21–40% of their travel expense on food and beverage, 28% of total respondents spent from 41–60%. These answers were mostly from people motivated to travel by food. They mentioned that food and beverage affected their travel decision and they were aware of the “culinary tourism” concept. On the contrary, 15% of the total respondents who answered that they spent 0–20% of travel expenses were least concerned about food and beverages as they did not regard cuisine as a factor affecting travel decisions and only took part in a few culinary activities. This trait is similar to the trait of accidental culinary tourists which has been discussed in chapter 2. It is understandable because while travelling, there are many other activities to take part in aside from culinary activities. A small percentage of people reported spending from 61–100% on food and beverage, showing great affection towards



cuisine and participating in various food-related activities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this characteristic describes deliberate culinary tourists.

Some great restaurants and cooking schools here. I'd urge people to try more street food though. (R12)

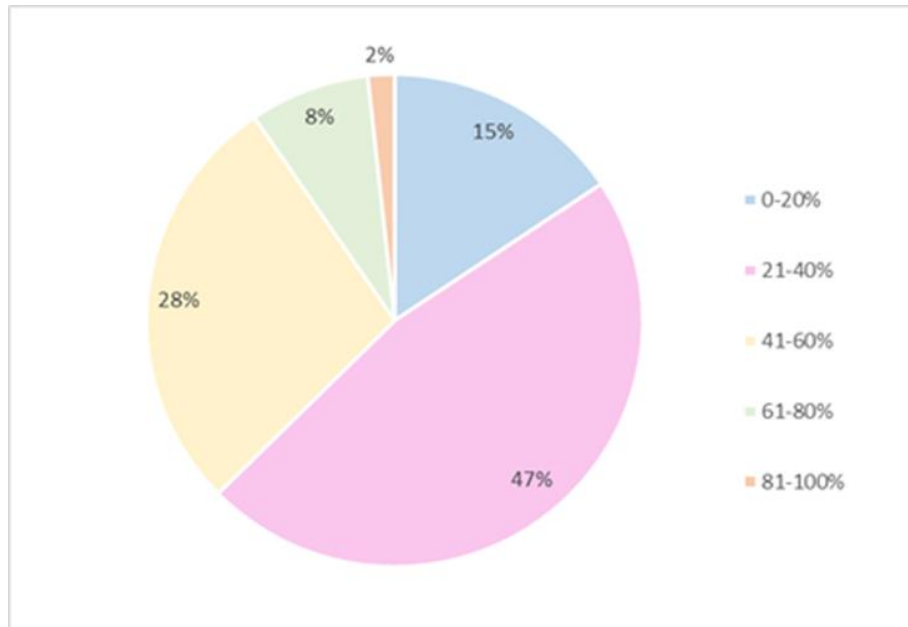


Figure 10. Percentage of travel expenses respondents spend on food and beverages during holidays (N=116)

### 5.1.3 Eating Behaviours While Travelling

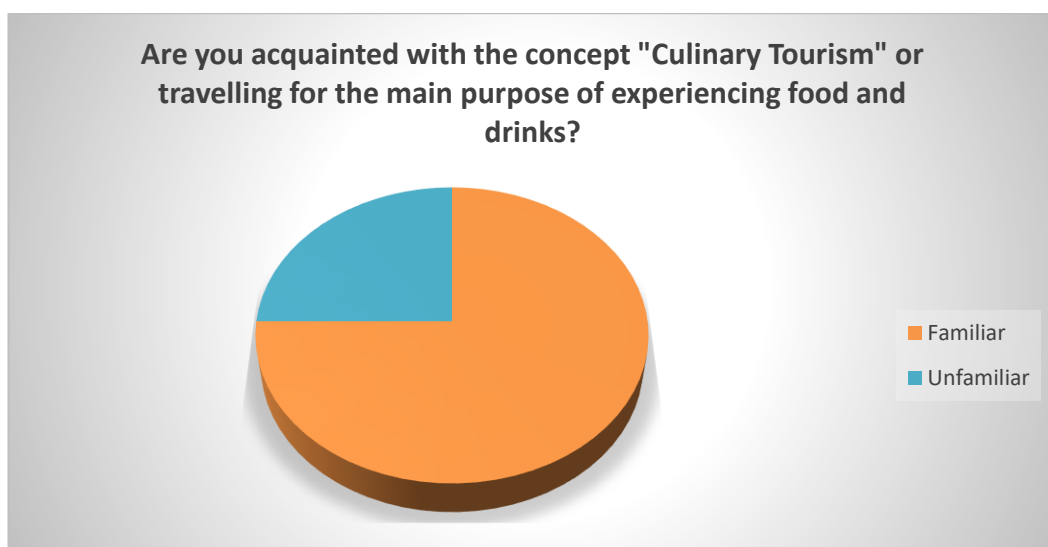


Figure 11. Percentage of respondents familiar with "Culinary Tourism" (N=116)

In order to find out how familiar the respondents were with culinary tourism, a close-ended question was provided as shown in Figure 11. In case some people might use the term “food tourism” or “gastronomic tourism” instead of “culinary tourism”, a short explanation was given after the term to ensure that all of them could understand the question properly.

The pie chart shows that most of the surveyed people (75%) were acquainted with the concept. There were only 29 of all respondents who answered “No” to the question. From this result, it can be inferred that travelling for food and beverage experiences is becoming relatively popular nowadays.

A Likert 5-point scale was used in the questionnaire to measure the participants’ attitude towards specific dining habits that tourists might keep when travelling. According to Joshi et al. (2015, 397), the Likert scale combines a set of statements, which is used to test the existing or hypothetical cases in the study. This metric scale allows participants to express their degree of agreement or disagreement, through which their opinions about the matters can be specifically reflected. In question 13, the participants were given 8 statements depicting some eating behaviours of travellers and asked to rate their attitude about each of the items ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The results are shown in the form of percentage in the Table 4 in the following page.

Table 4. Respondents' reflection of their eating habits while travelling (N=116)

Statement	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
I just eat when I'm hungry, no special plan	15.5	21.6	21.6	30.1	11.2
I follow the travel group and eat at places planned by travel agency	38.8	27.6	20.7	9.5	3.4
I choose food first, then location	10.3	25.9	27.6	24.1	12.1
I eat at places near my accommodation	6.1	22.4	25.9	35.3	10.3
I only eat at places offering clean food	4.3	21.6	21.6	36.2	16.3
I eat food similar to what I eat at home	38.8	38.8	15.5	6.9	0
I look for places that are crowded and frequently visited by locals	5.2	9.5	16.4	37.9	31
I often read reviews before making decisions	3.4	10.3	19.9	37.1	29.3

Regarding the statement "I just eat when I'm hungry, no special plan", the percentage of respondents agreeing (30.1%) was higher than that of people disagreeing with it (21.6%). In comparison, the ratio of people choosing "strongly agree" (11.2%) was marginally lower than the ones who strongly disagreed with the sentence (15.5%). The difference in these percentages is not remarkably evident, yet it still shows that more people are in favour of this eating habit while being on a trip. It can be understood that not a small number of travellers

somehow still consider eating as a usual necessity rather than a special activity during the journey.

In response to the second statement, a significant majority of the respondents strongly disapproved (38.8%) and disagreed (27.6%) with following travel mates and only eating at venues arranged by the travel company. In contrast, only a small fraction of respondents (12.9%) were on the side of this idea and the neutral opinions accounted for 20.7%. The data indicates that most of the travellers in this survey had preferences for making their own decisions on dining experiences at the destination compared to being guided on a tour. From our perspectives, this data is very crucial for the commissioned company to consider whether the rise of independent travellers today may lead to fewer number of customers who buy their full packages in the future. Taking it into account, the company can create a strategic plan for retaining customers.

The statement “I choose food first, then location” was put in the questionnaire with a view to finding out whether the food or location would be the priority for tourists while travelling. Interestingly, the percentages of respondents in favour of and against this behaviour were equal (36.2%). The rest of them had unbiased opinions about it (27.6%). The fourth sentence refers to a location choice when being on a vacation holiday. The total proportions of the surveyed people who would choose to dine in the venues near their accommodation (45.6%) were 1.6 times greater than those who opposed it (28.5%). This somehow illustrates that most tourists may regard a convenient or adjacent location as a critical element when deciding where they would like to spend their dining experience. The purpose of the fifth statement is to figure out to which extent food hygiene and sanitation are important to the travellers. 36.2% of the respondents agreed that they would only go to places where clean food is served, while 21.6% of the total numbers disagreed with it. Similarly, the number of “strongly agree” responses was over 10% higher than that of “strongly disagree” answers.

Almost 80% of the respondents refused to have the same meal while travelling as the way they ate in their everyday life. Approximately 7% of them approved of the idea and there was no “strongly agree” response recorded in the survey’s result. The percentage of neutral opinions was also relatively low (15.5%). The

result shed light on the theoretical framework of previous researchers that tourists are usually open to try local cuisine which can be novel, unfamiliar to what they eat in regular routines (Quan & Wang 2004, Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016b, as cited in Sthapit 2017, 4).

Generally, over 65% of the respondents often read reviews before making decisions and sought the places busy and frequently paid a visit by locals. There was a minor fraction of the participants (less than 15%) in disagreement with these behaviours. The ratios of unbiased viewpoints only made up less than 20% of total responses as well. This demonstrates that many people tend to be selective and careful when it comes to choosing a place to eat during their trips. Spending time and effort in seeking the information about the restaurants or food partly indicates that these travellers think highly of the culinary experiences that they will gain in the destination. It can be seen that travellers nowadays no longer perceive eating simply as a survival requisite but more as a tourism activity to which they can pay a great deal of attention in an attempt to make it a positive experience (Dixit 2019, 25).

#### 5.1.4 Expectation for Culinary Tourism Experience in Vietnam

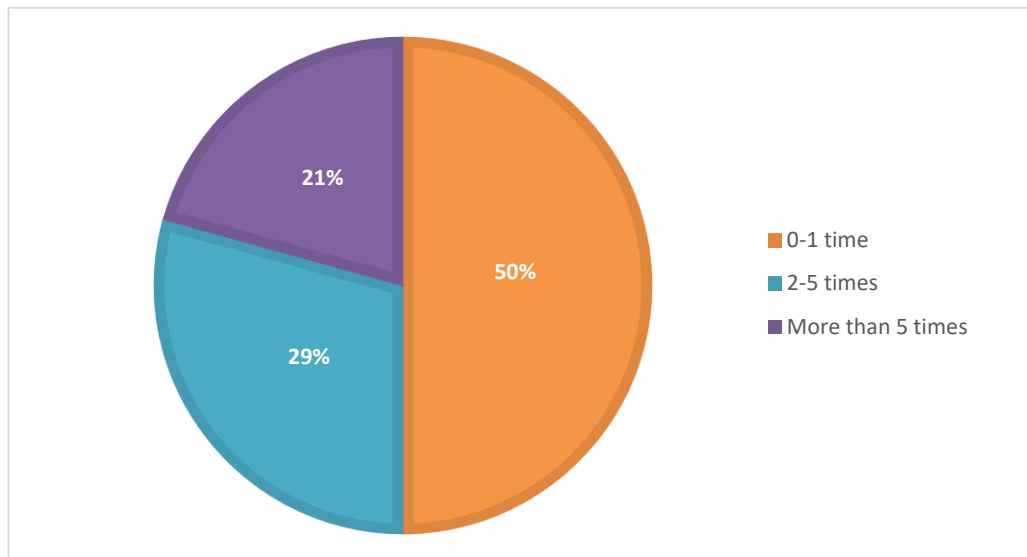


Figure 12. Total number of times respondents who have travelled to Vietnam (N=116)

Half of the total respondents were those who had never visited Vietnam or been here for the first time. To be specific, 54 people answered that it was their first

time in Vietnam. Only 4 respondents revealed that they had never been to Vietnam but would like to visit it someday. 29% of the participants had travelled here from two to five times and the rest of them (21%) had already made their trips to the country more than five times. According to Mihelj (2010, 1078), tourists' expectations for novel experiences in the destination are often influenced by their travel habits or earlier tourism experiences. Tourists who go on many more trips abroad tend to hold higher expectations compared to those who travel less. For instance, once tourists have travelled to a destination, they are inclined to expect to earn more or different experiences in that place when they return there (Mihelj, 2010, 1078.)

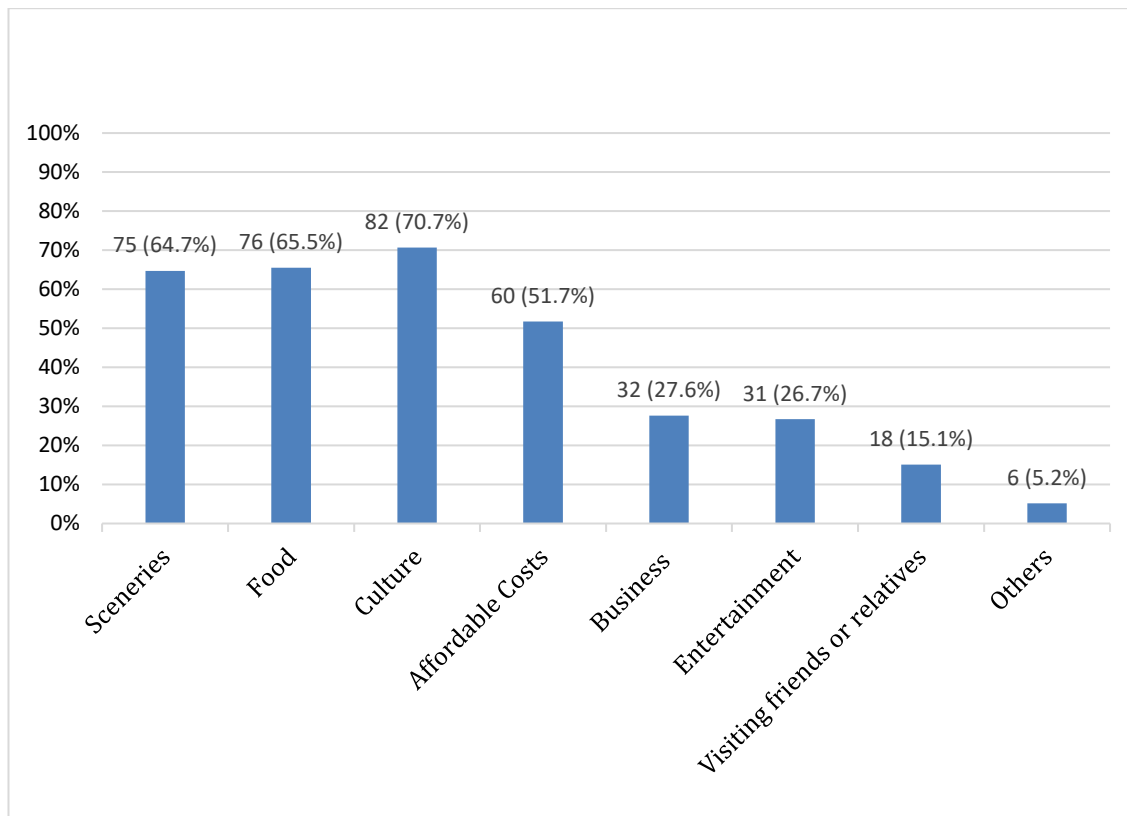


Figure 13. Respondents' motivation for travelling to Vietnam (N=116)

The participants were asked about the major reasons motivating them to visit Vietnam. There were seven specific options, as shown in Figure 13. The result illustrates that most of the participants found culture the strongest incentive to visit Vietnam, which was indicated by 82 responses of the overall number (over 70%). The second most influential factors stimulating their desire for travelling to Vietnam were the food and sceneries. These factors reached almost equal numbers of answers, which were 76 and 75, respectively. As the average price

of a vacation trip in Vietnam is quite budget-friendly and tourists' daily spending tends to be more low-cost than developed countries, over half of total respondents found it tempting to pay a visit here. Slightly over a quarter of these travellers were motivated by business and leisure trips. While 15.1% of them would like to travel here with the purpose of visiting friends or relatives, the rest selected other options besides the given ones. Specifically, 6 people said that they yearned for coming to Vietnam for “education”, “exploration”, “new life”, “gap year”, “making friends” and “simply a desire to travel”.

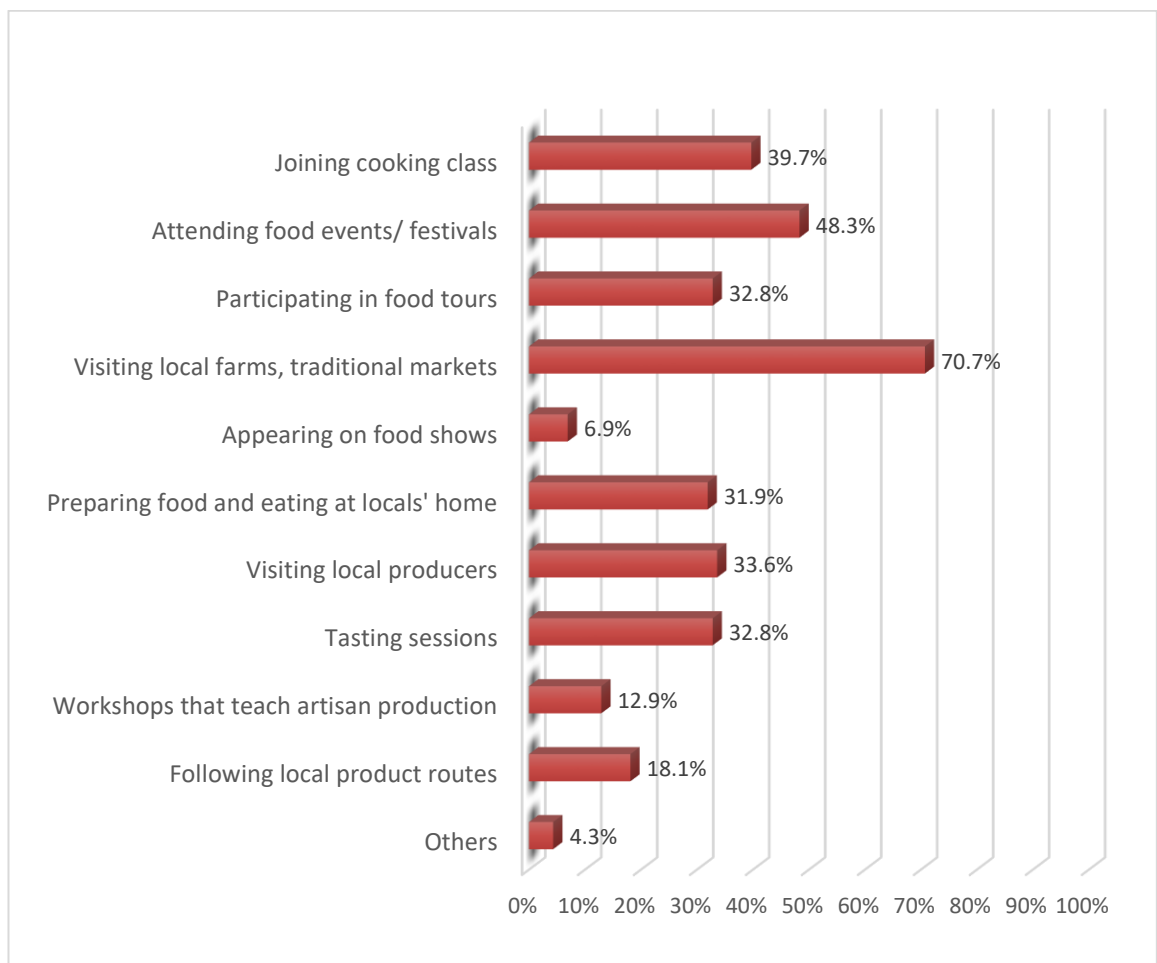


Figure 14. Culinary activities respondents expect to participate in when visiting Vietnam (N=116)

Question 15 in the survey concerns the culinary experiences that tourists expected to gain while being in Vietnam. Participants were given 10 common tourism activities related to food. The aim of this question is to gain a better understanding of inbound travellers' expectations towards gastronomic experiences when they travel to Vietnam. The result from Figure 14 shows that

the most expected activity within culinary tourism in Vietnam was visiting local farms and traditional markets, with more than 70% of overall responses recorded in the result. The second most wanted experience was attending food events or festivals, indicated by nearly half of the total respondents. Approximately 40% of them expected to participate in cooking classes while 33.6% would like to visit local manufacturers. Interestingly, the proportion of those who desired to go on food tours and tasting sessions were the same (32.8%). The number of people wanting to prepare food and dine together with locals at their home was also close to these figures, with 37 responses. The activities that seemed to be less attractive to the surveyed tourists compared to the above-mentioned ones were following local product routes, workshops teaching artisan production and appearing on food shows (18.1%, 12.9% and 6.9%, respectively). Apart from these, 4.3% of the respondents selected the option "others". They stated that their expectations were "going to many restaurants and trying the food", "visiting popular restaurants", "simply eating food", "eating street food" or "having a meal in peace". It can be seen that all of the expectations stated beyond the given options mostly involved the strong desire for trying local food.

#### 5.1.5 Post-travel Evaluation of Respondents for Culinary Experience in Vietnam

In the survey, participants were provided with a selection of six cuisine-involved activities, which are currently the most popular forms of culinary tourism in Vietnam. They were asked to choose the activities that they had experienced during their stay in the country. Figure 15 in the following page illustrates the comparison between each of the following categories in terms of number of participants.



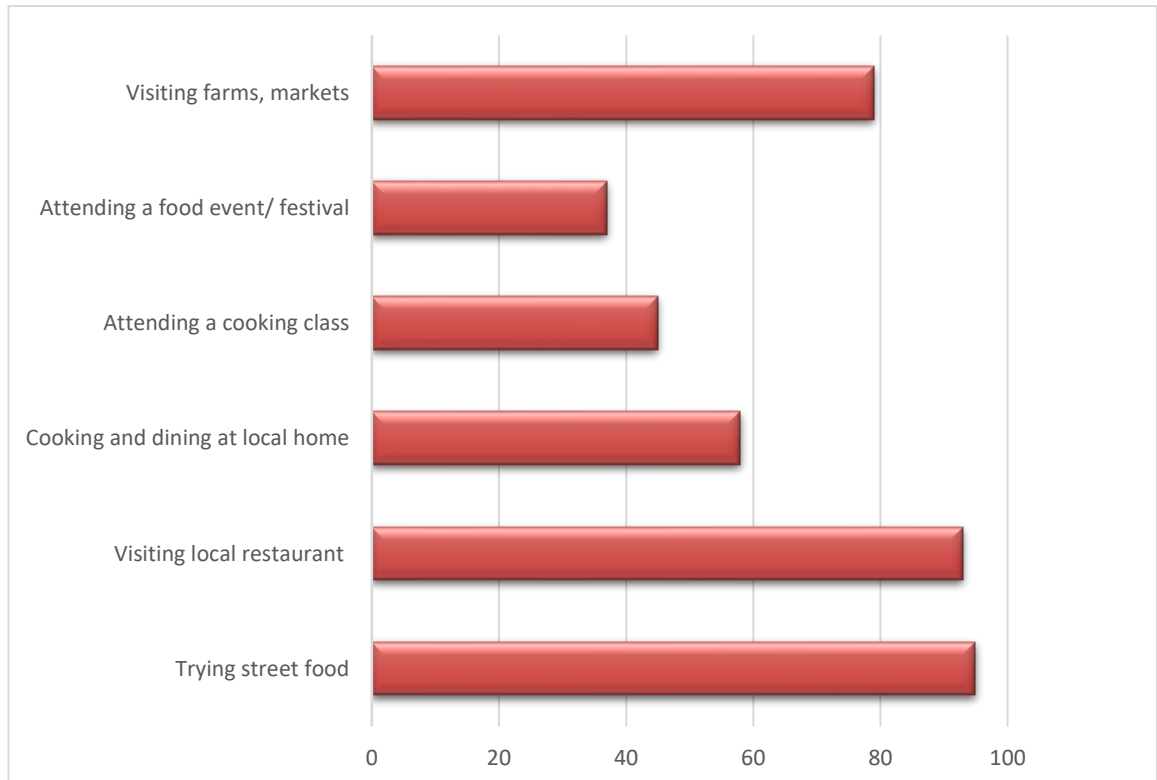


Figure 15. The percentage of respondents that have experienced given culinary activities during their trip to Vietnam (N=116)

The result indicates that tasting street food stood out as the most prevalent gastronomic activity, which had the highest number of participants compared to other types given. Visiting local restaurant ranks second, as 93 of 116 respondents answered that they did it when travelling to Vietnam. Visitation to farms or markets is among one of the top culinary activities, which had the participation of 79 respondents in this survey. Preparing food and eating with locals at their home is middle ranked, with half of the total respondents experiencing it. Attending a cooking class on Vietnamese cuisine seems to be less popular than the above-mentioned activities, with 45 responses recorded. Food events and festivals appear to be the least popular category of culinary tourism in the destination, as only 37 people (nearly 32%) answered to have taken part in it.

The Likert 5-point scale was also applied to the following question in the survey to measure the satisfaction level of participants towards each of those activities provided. The scale varies from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied”, in which the

former is equivalent to 1 point and the latter is equal to 5 points. The average score for each category is presented in Figure 16.

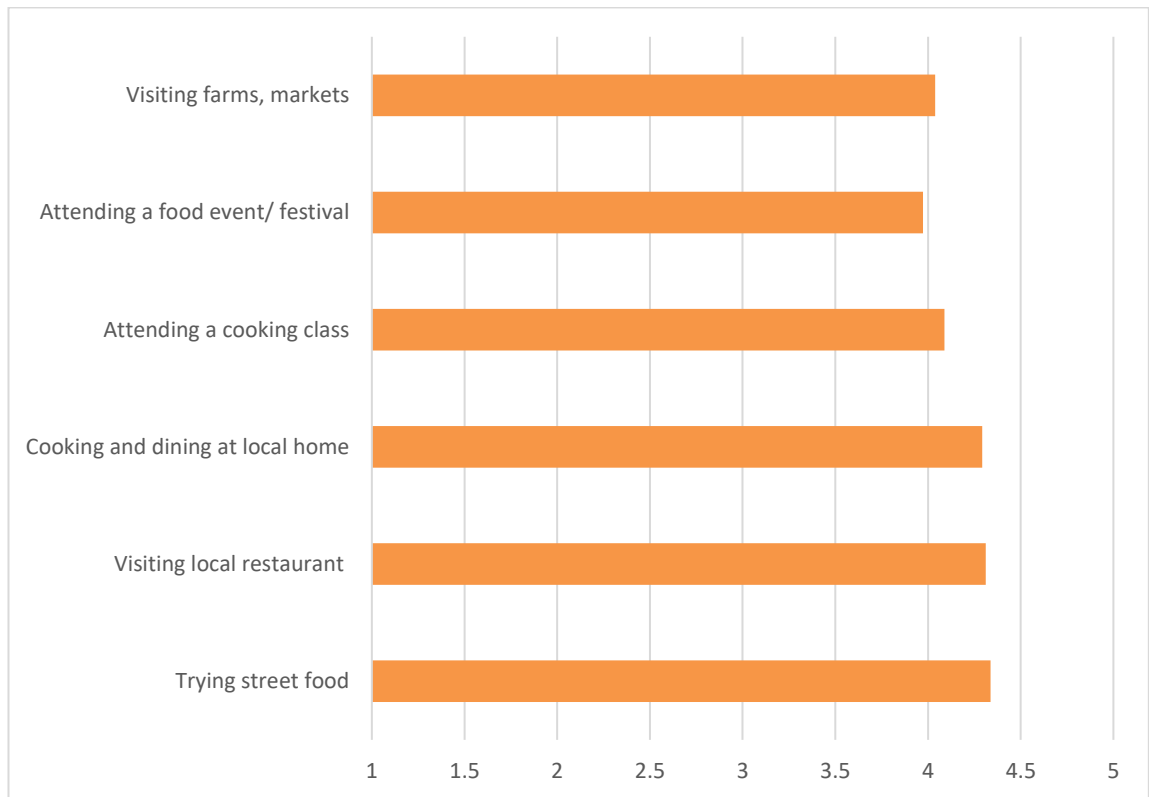


Figure 16. Average rating of satisfaction towards each of those perceived culinary experiences in Vietnam (N=112)

On average, the respondents' evaluation ranged from 3.97 to 4.33, lying between "neutral" and "satisfied" feelings. Trying street food was recorded to receive the highest degree of satisfaction. Eating at local restaurants was the second culinary activity that won the participants' heart, hitting a striking score of 4.31. The activity of cooking and dining at a local home was also found to be very satisfying to a significant majority of people who have participated in it. There was only one respondent that stated to feel dissatisfied with the experience; otherwise, the others had very positive attitudes towards it. The rest of the activities in the chart (namely participation in cooking class, food events or festivals and visitation to farms or markets) had a slightly lower ranking compared to those above-mentioned. However, their scores were still relatively high, reaching approximately 4.0 points on average.

Popular forms of culinary tourism such as tasting street food, visiting local restaurants, farms or markets tend to approach more participants since it is

possible for tourists to get them done at any time of the year when they arrive in the country. These activities are flexible and changeable within the schedule of travellers. It means that when they take place largely depends on the travellers' decision. On the other hand, the occurrence of events, cooking lessons or dining with locals usually involves a specific time of the year or day, which sometimes fails to fit the schedule of travellers. Going to food events and cooking classes are among the top expectations that a remarkable number of tourists in this survey had, but not many of them had got the opportunity to access these types of experience yet. It is important to make them become more widespread and popular in the destination's culinary market, as they also have a great potential to satisfy plenty of inbound travellers in the future.



Figure 17. Respondents' behaviours after trying culinary experiences in Vietnam (N=112)

To acquire a clearer understanding of inbound tourists' overall satisfaction as well as post-travel behaviours towards culinary experiences in Vietnam, question 17

provided a set of 10 statements which required respondents to choose their degree of agreement. The Likert 5-point scale continued to be used to measure their behaviours. The food experience in Vietnam as a whole was perceived as good by most of the respondents. The average score of their overall satisfaction is 4.26. It was mostly agreed that the culinary experience came up to what they had expected prior to the trip, but it was still not enough to surpass their expectations at all. The ratios of the participants agreeing that they would share their experiences with others after the journey or would recommend visiting the country to try Vietnamese cuisine are relatively high, with averages of over 4.0 points recorded. While the score of travellers' revisit intention for food experiences is around 4.0, the intention of visiting restaurants offering Vietnamese cuisine in their home country has almost reached this point. There were not many respondents who agreed with either gaining more knowledge of the food or wanting to learn how to cook the dishes that they tried in the destination. Most of them held neutral viewpoints towards this and around 10% of them went against these two statements. Only a minor percentage of the participants had the intention of purchasing local ingredients or food to bring home as souvenirs. Of all stated behaviours, the average score of this is the least, remaining at 3.6 points.

The last question put in the survey is an open-ended one. The purpose of using this question type is to enable participants to convey their thoughts and feelings freely about the topic. As respondents are not limited to a certain number of options in contrast to closed questions, they can express their opinions more accurately and contribute to the development ideas. (Siniscalco & Auriat 2005, 26.)

The participants were asked what they thought about culinary tourism experience in Vietnam and how it could be developed in the future. 62 people responded to this question. A remarkable number of respondents complimented on Vietnamese cuisine or gained positive experiences involving with it. The most feasible features that made most of them enjoy Vietnamese gastronomy were the freshness, healthiness, simplicity but deliciousness of traditional food. The wide diversity in ingredients and balance in flavour were also crucial elements creating a unique taste of some dishes.

I honestly believe that Vietnamese cuisine is one of the healthiest in the world, is all about freshness. (R3)

My experience with Vietnamese cuisine has been extraordinary so far. The country is blessed with great diversity in foods and drinks, and it definitely stands out from the global cuisine thanks to the unique flavor of Nuoc Mam. (R10)

Love the food in Vietnam. The cheap street food is tasty and the more expensive restaurant food is clean and tasty too. When I travel, half the fun is experiencing the cuisine, and I am always very pleased with Vietnamese food, fresh, cheap, tasty, full of flavour and satisfying. (R38)

Many respondents appeared to be very interested in the cultures behind the food. While some supported the idea of promoting Vietnamese cuisine's image worldwide through media, several suggested that too much exposure to marketing could lead to an erosion of cultural identity and authenticity of the cuisine. It is hence critical to consider balancing between marketing images of the cuisine and its original traditional values. In the tourism industry, food or cuisine is a crucial component of a destination brand image, which is not less important than other factors such as landscape, attraction spots, entertainment venues, transportation. Cuisine can even become a brand image that is defined as a unique selling point of the destination. For that reason, it is vital for marketers to create a tourist-friendly image based on the inherent traditional values of the local gastronomy. (Okumus & McKercher 2007, as cited in Lai et al. 2017, 242.)

[...] Their cuisine is fantastic and the food taste great for everyone. I hope them can join more food festivals in the world so as to introduce their proud and help their country more popular all over the world!!! (R30)

[...] I hope it doesn't become too commercialised because then the culinary cultural experience and identity could be lost. I prefer the simplicity of local dishes and not the big food chains or fast food chains which are beginning to appear fast. (R7)

In particular, a certain number of survey participants gained memorable experiences with street food while staying in Vietnam. Some expressed the desire

to encourage others to give it a good try while some advocated the idea of expanding tourism activities related to this concept such as developing “cycling street food tour”, “street food restaurants” with high standards. It was also suggested that local travel agencies should organise tours of street food venues with the right promotion campaign in order to capture smaller groups such as individual travellers and couples.

People should be taught not to fear street food, some of our most amazing and memorable meals have been completely unexpected, street meals or backstreet local restaurants. (R31)

I think the best options are street food tours and cooking classes. Maybe a cycling street food tour. (R33)

Vietnam is already famous for food in the world... May develop the high standard with Michelin stars for some street food restaurants like in Thailand. (R18)

Contrary to many positive aspects and strengths of the Vietnamese cuisine that tourists mentioned, there are still a lot of challenges and weaknesses in the destination from their perspectives. First of all, the percentage of Vietnamese residents who speak no English or have limited English proficiency is relatively high. According to statistics given by EPI (2015), Vietnam has been listed in the group of low English proficiency since 2015. In 2019, its ranking has declined to 52<sup>nd</sup> out of 100 countries. Although the number of nations participating in the survey has continued to go up throughout the last few years, Vietnam’s ranking has almost remained unchanged. This somehow illustrates that the country has been facing the dilemma of catching up with others in terms of English competence. (Phan 2019.) This can become a huge barrier that hinders the communication process between foreign tourists and locals. Several respondents revealed that they had troubles in finding locations offering palatable and authentic dishes during their stay in Vietnam. Due to the lack of instructions in English in addition to low English ability of many locals, they had to depend largely on the Internet to do some research on different restaurants and their dishes. This is claimed as rather difficult to elder people. Since local stalls or authentic restaurants are mostly promoted in Vietnamese language, they are

frequently visited by people rather than non-locals. Meanwhile, restaurants located in tourist spots are likely to approach travellers more as they use English to promote themselves. Some of them only tend to target foreign tourists for profit rather than paying attention to the quality of the dishes. This could result in the dissatisfaction about Vietnamese gastronomy, especially to those who have visited the country for the first time. In the hope of having problems tackled, a number of respondents suggested designing mobile applications that could recommend good places for tasting local food and introduce those dishes in English language. By doing so, international travellers would find it a lot more convenient and easier to seek culinary experiences on their own.

[...] English still very low in very local places. Quite hard to find the best local food. It's often places known from Vietnamese only. (R9)

[...] the region that dishes come from could be better promoted in English language for tourists and promoted with the local culture, especially for the older travellers who would not be as confident to use the internet for research. Also, more descriptions of the ingredients used would encourage more older people to try different foods. Thank you! (R11)

[...] It will be good if the internet or maps could show more places for food that locals patronize compared to those heavily advertised as it could be pretty misleading and disappointing. (R25)

The second issue of tourism in Vietnam is overcharging the price of products, which is usually triggered by small businesses and retailers. It is generally known as “tourism scams” that happen to many inbound tourists when they travel to Vietnam. Several participants in this survey claimed on behalf of foreign travellers that they were swindled out of money when local restaurants or sellers asked them to pay considerably higher than what indigenous people actually pay for the same product. The official statistics released by Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) in 2017 indicated that the rate of travellers returning to Vietnam kept being low due to the scams caused by a bad community existing in the country. According to Nguyen Xuan Phuc – the Prime Minister of Vietnam, it is urgent that the scam must be cracked down on or the image of the destination and Vietnamese people could be seriously damaged. In recent years, the

government has enacted stricter rules and imposed heavier fines on tourism businesses, service providers and sellers that have the intention of taking advantage of tourists for individual profits. Even though the situation has been improved, such problem has left negative impressions on a certain number of tourists and impeded the nation's efforts to build a pure destination image. (Viet Nam News 2019.)

It is very important to crack down on businesses and people that charge foreigners more than locals for dishes when they eat in the same restaurant. This really bothers experienced travelers and this is the sort that come to Vietnam. (R1)

If some Vietnamese don't cheat Koreans for prices of product, it could be better. (R17)

The third negative issue mentioned by a lot of respondents is related to food hygiene and safety. Coming to Vietnam, tourists are usually captivated by seeing a wide variety of fresh and tasty dishes from street food vendors or stalls, but these are not always safe for them to try. The survey conducted by Sanofi-Aventis Vietnam Co. Ltd in 2017 gathered over a thousand responses from Australian travellers. 40% of total participants revealed that they used to get ill while travelling to Vietnam mainly due to food-related issues such as stomach-ache, diarrhoea or even food poisoning. Most inbound travellers have reflected that the ingredients are often not covered properly. They also claim that many local sellers prepare fresh and ready-to-eat food without wearing protective gloves. Another reason that makes street food often unsafe for health is the vague origin of its ingredient. Due to the increase in the price of ingredients, many food vendors and small restaurant owners have approached sources that cost less with lower quality to retain their profits. Those behaviours are worth condemning when they prioritize their own benefits over the health of others. At the moment, food safety is still one of the biggest concerns in the country. It will pose serious threats to the growth of the Vietnamese tourism industry unless it is completely solved. (VTV News 2017.)

[..] it'd be better if the sanitary issues of street food are prioritized since there have been cases of food poison among tourists. Once this problem is dealt



with properly, it would set every traveller's mind at peace to enjoy culinary tourism in Vietnam. (R10)

The problem of hygiene for street food should be solved. Need clean ice and ingredients for cooking. (R19)

I think Vietnam can improve overall food safety and cleanliness of restaurants/small street food shops (like Thailand or Singapore or Hong Kong). (R40)

A few participants who have never experienced the culinary tourism in Vietnam showed tremendous interest in visiting the country for the experience. These include the ones who have never travelled to Vietnam and the one who have been here but have not tried it yet. This is a positive sign showing that Vietnam is an attractive destination for cuisine from the perspectives of international tourists. However, it is greatly important that all problems aforementioned should be tackled properly in order not to tarnish the destination image and to diminish the potential travellers' fear for their food-related experiences in Vietnam.

As I have never been in Vietnam, I unfortunately cannot answer this question. [...] I am really curious to have a culinary tourism experience in Vietnam though. (R37)

## 5.2 Interview Content Analysis

### 5.2.1 Current Opportunities for Culinary Tourism in Vietnam

As stated in two interviews with the stakeholders, both agree with the idea that Vietnamese cuisine is diverse and partly the soul of Vietnamese culture, and a means to deliver Vietnamese's hospitality to international friends. According to the stakeholders, the characteristics and special features of Vietnamese cuisine are its diversity and attractiveness. From North to South, there are different dishes, distinct flavours, colourful presentation that connects to each region. In particular, street food is favoured and highly recommended by many foreign visitors.

[...] If I have the importance scale for food in Vietnamese tourism industry, I will rank it 5 out of 5. [...] local cuisines and fusion dishes are what truly highlight the local lifestyle and parts of tradition in one culture, [...] food does reflect Vietnamese people's hospitality. You can see the norm 'street food' and 'street restaurants' have become famous and common once a foreign friend mentions Vietnam. (S1)

We have fresh products and ingredients to rapidly supply the needs in the tourism market with extreme quality [...]. We have a lovely 'street' culture with street stalls or local restaurants which offer food that tastes like home. [...] We have a wonderful Eastern base that Western culture longs for, to explore and discover. (S2)

Vietnamese cuisine has been gaining popularity in recent years, putting its name on the map with many times appearing in various renowned lists. In 2019, Vietnam was awarded with honour as Asia's Leading Culinary Destination for the first time, helping the country promote its image in the international tourism market (Nhan Dan 2019). Pho – Vietnamese noodle, was recognized as the first of "40 meals you should eat in your lifetime" by Business Insider in 2015, a "bowl of heaven" by Huffington Post, or no. 28 in the list of the world's 50 best dishes, saying "some dishes you eat to stay alive, while others you eat because to not eat them would be a crime" (VIETNAMNEWS 2015). Banh mi, a famous street food has been admitted into Oxford dictionary due to its omnipresence in daily conversation (Tuong 2011). Other Vietnamese dishes have also been mentioned and praised by vloggers, famous chefs, and reporters, with unique flavours, distinctive seasoning, and food preparing methods differentiated by the regions. These examples indicate that Vietnamese food has long been highly rated among people around the world. Therefore, the potential to develop products and services based on this advantage would likely be successful and welcomed by tourists if they are promoted well. Thanks to the diversity and abundance in variety and taste, Vietnamese cuisine can be turned into products or services in various ways to attract tourists. Novelty-seeking is a vital characteristic for the tourists' travel motivations and influences their emotions and decision-making behaviours (Petrick 2002, as cited in Chen, Feng & Kim 2020, 7). Therefore, the urge to develop Vietnamese cuisine and make it more outstanding and appealing

with unique traits would be beneficial in bringing Vietnamese culinary tourism nearer to the international tourism market.

We have a very unique, attractive and diverse culinary system as what I mentioned above... So we can make the best use of all precious resources that we have. It's feasible to include a wide range of activities in these programs that help to attract a lot of potential tourists. (S1)

The survey has pointed out that Vietnam is a potential culinary market for international tourists, as many respondents showed interest and expressed the hope to visit or revisit Vietnam for more culinary experiences. America and South Korea seem to be two big markets that are attracted by Vietnamese cuisine. The US has been dominant in importing Vietnam's food and agricultural products, becoming the largest importer with Vietnam's export turnover to the market reaching US\$ 38.45 billion in 2016, and US\$ 34.7 billion in the first 10 months of 2017 (VOV 2017). Being in a good term with the international stakeholders can provide good opportunities for Vietnamese stakeholders to find business partners to corporate and broaden the market. International tourists show satisfaction behaviour at a moderate and high level towards various culinary activities such as tasting street food, visiting local restaurants, farms or markets. These activities are often included in tour packages provided by travel agencies and pretty popular among international tourists, as mentioned in the survey analysis. Not only do the travel agencies gain more attention from tourists, but they can also develop a distinctive feature of the product to stand out in the market and at the same time, extend their market in the industry. Once the product is loved by the customers, there would be higher possibilities of revisit.

To me, the gastronomic theme is a very good concept that I really wish the company would adopt in the next years, so I'll propose the development idea to my team in the discussion to see how other members will vote on it. (S1)

Good news is we've been cooperating with many local stakeholders that can assist us in delivering high-quality products to customers. (S1)

[...] our products are chosen and crafted by ourselves, therefore, we can guarantee the quality of our product and competitive prices. We constantly

examine the market and new trendy food spots to bring tourists the most satisfactory experiences. (S2)

Our food tour is not only about food, but also about the discovery of the destination's culture and people. [...] tourists have more approaches towards local cuisine and get to know how the food is prepared, made, and served. [...] Our company always expects that through our products, tourists can experience the trip through 5 senses and come home with memorable memories. (S2)

As culinary tourism is developing and gaining more intention from the community, it proves to be an industry that is worth investing in. Marketing is one of the indispensable factors deciding the success of culinary tourism in a destination. In recent years, stakeholders do not only use traditional ways to promote their products but experiment more feasible methods to draw attention from customers.

At the beginning, we will probably offer discounts to attract new customers. [...] we'll try to optimize the quality of our products and services. [...] once customers feel satisfied with what you offer to them, they'll tend to share their good experiences and leave positive feedback about you to other people. [...] you don't need to put so much effort or money in advertising how good your products are supposed to be. Let customers themselves do it for you. (S1)

[...] We focus on promoting our products on social media, especially on Facebook and Instagram. [...] we realize the importance of the story function of these channels in marketing. [...] we cooperated with a food blogger, took her to a Hanoi food tour, she tagged our company's account on her Instagram stories, which showed authentic experiences right on spot. We believe that can raise curiosity among the viewers. That is one method we newly adopted, besides the traditional marketing methods, and we are still figuring out more ways to promote and make our products reach more people. (S2)

Each stakeholder applies a different method of marketing. S1 uses the word-of-mouth power and is confident that the customer's satisfaction toward the product will help the company advertise the hospitable image to other customers. On the

other hand, S2 combines both traditional methods with new strategy ideas in their marketing. It depends on each company's business model, characteristics of the products to build appropriate marketing plans. Marketing plays an important part in making customers aware of the culinary products companies offer. On a wider scale, marketing is the voice and image of the destination, it reaches tourists before the trip actually takes place, therefore, leaves an impression on tourists and acts as a factor influencing tourists' travel decisions.

### 5.2.2 Current Challenges for Culinary Tourism in Vietnam

Both of the interviewed stakeholders assumed that the quality of restaurants and their customer services could have substantial impacts on the gastronomic experiences of visitors. As the eating demands together with tourism activities are becoming more diverse, a lot of private businesses in Vietnam come into operation without having been verified regarding the quality yet. This results in distinctive food-involved experiences that tourists may earn when visiting the country. Customers who discover prestigious locations are likely to have extraordinary experiences with the cuisine. Meanwhile, others who go to the wrong places can become disappointed with the food quality or customer service. The scenario gets even worse if any food-related problem occurs to them, which is triggered by uncertain and unqualified procedures.

Indeed, because food tours are trendy, many instant restaurants and tour operators grow out of nowhere and are in the function so quickly...that got travelers into the maze of choice. Some are amazing, some are horrible due to the inexperienced procedures and customer services. (S1)

Many tourists have positive experiences with Vietnamese street food, while some people heavily criticize this. (S2)

According to S2, the levels of categorization between different types of restaurants in Vietnam are still relatively ambiguous at the moment. Based on international standards, the differences between fine-dining, casual dining, fast-casual restaurants should be already discernible from the dishes to the way they are displayed on the table. Meanwhile, Vietnam still lacks a standard ranking system for eating establishments. Many fine-dining restaurants and small food stalls

include more or less the same type of dishes in their menu such as Pho, Bun Cha. Food offerings do not appear significantly different in these places, yet high-class restaurants are undoubtedly superior to the lower ones in terms of food safety and customer service.

Another weakness, which is quite clear is the [...] ambiguous levels between restaurant systems: the fine-dining, the boutique, the street-based. There is no basic system for each restaurant, so you can see that it's kinda confusing. (S2)

In order to ensure the homogeneous quality in each level of restaurants, it is very crucial to develop a common system that categorizes restaurants based on a set of evaluative criteria. A rating scale for each category should be used when examining the quality of a restaurant regarding a variety of factors. This may facilitate the standardization of food quality and catering services.

Besides, both interviewees stated food hygiene and safety as a worrisome concern for culinary tourism in Vietnam at present. This problem mainly occurs in street food restaurants, local stalls and vendors where the ingredients are usually found unclean or unsafe for customers to consume. The second stakeholder also reflected the same picture as some surveyed respondents described that some food sellers have no gloves on their hands when touching the ingredients and the food is generally uncovered while being exposed to the air. This makes the food very unhygienic due to the possible penetration of bacteria from their hands, bugs and dust in the air, not mentioning the fact that there is an enormous amount of harmful emission from different vehicles on the road. The stakeholder also criticized that food waste or sewage is commonly seen to be disposed improperly on the street, which makes the places extremely insanitary. Eating in this condition not only causes an unpleasant feeling for guests but also proves to be unhealthy.

Especially considering street food as a part of the tour, we'll need to be very careful and selective because the food quality can be not clean and hygienic enough at most street restaurants. What tourists eat and drink have direct impacts on their health. (S1)

They often complain about food being uncovered and sold in the street vendors that are exposed to the polluted air and emission from vehicles. [...] many retailers wrap the food by hand without wearing sanitary gloves [...] it's even more annoying to witness unhygienic food waste on the ground and improper sewage disposal, which makes those places lose such a big attractiveness to tourists. (S2)

It has been reported that pesticides, antibiotic or other harmful chemicals are often found in vegetables or meat. Some food businesses do not perform the methods of preparing, processing and maintaining ingredients carefully, which results in a lot of contaminated products for sales. Those foods continue to be distributed to smaller restaurants and food stalls and finally sold to tourists. Food poisonings or related symptoms may take a few days to show up after the food is digested but consuming such products is likely to cause cancers in the long run. It is argued that individuals who carry out distribution and selling activities of high-risk food lack the codes of ethics. That accounts for their unethical behaviours when they sell unsafe products for their own benefits regardless of the detrimental impacts that those foods impose on consumers' health. (Nguyet-Viet et al. 2017.)

Nowadays, many tourism stakeholders have started to control the quality of food more tightly in restaurants, hotels before verifying their operations in the tourism and hospitality industry. Not only the hygiene standards of food but the cleanliness of the establishments is also evaluated as the top priority in the rating scale. Since more foreign travellers are aware of the situation before coming to Vietnam, they are less likely to choose the random places to eat. Instead, they research more to discover prestigious locations for pleasant food experiences by reading through feedbacks on social media and destination's websites. Others decide to follow the tour program organized by local travel agencies to enjoy their travel experiences without feeling insecure. Even though the travellers can actively adopt their solutions to this issue, it will not help to tackle the problem effectively and completely unless the business owners or retailers alter their awareness and actions. (VTV News 2017.)

Another main problem about Vietnamese tourism that most survey respondents and the stakeholder refer to is overcharging inbound tourists. Many street food stalls or roadside stores charge tourists up to two or three times higher than what the dishes actually cost. Travellers who have never been in the country before are likely to accept to pay for the required amount, since they may not know well about the local price. There are also different cases of small restaurants unreasonably asking tourists to pay much more than the price displayed on the menu, which is said to be calculated as service charge by the waiters. These businesses or vendors try to generate profits from foreign tourists since they assume that tourists are wealthy and willing to spend much of their expenditure on local products (Kim 2016.) They are unaware of the behaviours' consequence that can lead to a sharp decline in the number of return visitors and how it can ruin the destination image in the future. For the time being, they solely think about their own profits without taking a long view of their behaviours' impacts on the nation.

[...] we pay 2 dollars for a bowl of Pho noodle while foreigners can be charged up to three times more than what it actually costs. [...] this type of overcharging is rather common in small local restaurants, stalls or food carts on the pavement [...] Tourists [...] don't know well about the average price of popular dishes [...] can be easily deceived by the lies told by unprincipled sellers. [...] Of course, they are just a small group of bad sellers and service providers in our country, [...] but they can create a bad image for our tourism in the long run. (S2)

Last but not least, the first stakeholder shared about the biggest challenge that Vietnamese tourism industry is currently encountering, which is the influence of Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). The widespread outbreak of COVID-19 has triggered detrimental impacts on many industries all over the world. In Vietnam, the influence of the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the economy, especially the tourism industry. Since the first two months of 2020, Vietnamese tourism has already witnessed tremendous losses caused by the disease. According to the statistics provided by the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, there was a dramatic decline (almost 40%) in the number of inbound tourists from January to February. This numerical data decreased by nearly 22% compared to the same



period in the previous year. There were sharp declines of around 20% to 50% in travel bookings and occupancy rates nationwide in comparison to the same period of 2019. (Nguyen 2020.)

From mid-March onwards, travel restrictions commanded by the government has led to the temporary halt of airlines, trip cancellations and every tourism activity. As a result of lockdowns and social distancing, many businesses in the industry have been forced to shut down temporarily, including restaurants, bars, cinemas and other entertainment venues to avoid gatherings. Tourism businesses are seen to fall in “hibernation mode” due to the complex Coronavirus situation. In the most affected cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, some hotels have turned into quarantine areas to accommodate suspected patients. An enormous number of employees have been out of jobs or have to take unpaid leaves for an unpredictable period of time. The tourism industry is estimated to suffer a toll from \$5.9 to \$7 billion in the following months, which is a severe damage to the economy of Vietnam. (Nguyen 2020.)

[...] the Coronavirus pandemic has caused a lot of damage to Vietnamese economy and yes, tourism is one of the most affected industries that has been seriously suffering so much loss. [...] our country temporarily bans inbound tourists and airlines also close all international flights until when we still don't know yet [...] our company has been facing a lot of challenges as a result. The number of customers declined terribly, and we are about to close our company temporarily until everything gets better. (S1)

### 5.3 Recommendations on Development Solutions

#### 5.3.1 Promoting Culinary Tourism Experiences in Vietnam

Though Vietnamese cuisine holds substantial unique features and traditional values, most of the international tourists still get access to them spontaneously and hence have contradictory opinions on Vietnamese cuisine. To expand the brand name of Vietnamese cuisine to the world, both individuals and different stakeholders need to coordinate their efforts to launch promotional campaigns and take part in food-targeted events organized either in or outside the country. Marketing strategies needed to efficiently be implemented via social media or a

wide range of events such as cuisine fairs, exhibitions and cooking contests. More importantly, those marketing tactics should not only focus on the image of serving food, eating or drinking but also reflect many related activities containing deep-rooted values of Vietnamese tradition. This enables foreign visitors to gain an in-depth understanding of traditional dishes and their profound essence.

To optimize tourists' experiences in culinary tourism with unique products, close-knitted cooperation is needed between different stakeholders such as local restaurants, tour operators, food event organizers, cooking schools. The majority of inbound tourists go for food tasting only when it comes to culinary tourism in Vietnam. It is suggested that tourism stakeholders launch food tours which combine various activities related to cuisine so that foreign visitors can learn more about Vietnamese gastronomy. Vietnamese culinary tourism is not simply about tasting or sampling indigenous specialties, but it is also a means through which Vietnam's time-honoured culture and vivid lifestyle linked to cuisine are introduced. The industry needs to diversify activities in culinary tourism with a view to attracting more international tourists as well as facilitating their selection process. The survey conducted in this paper has indicated that many travellers expect to visit traditional places where food is produced, to attend events about local cuisine, to join cooking classes or to have dining experiences at locals' home while being in Vietnam. Foreign visitors should be given the opportunity to engage themselves directly in cuisine-related activities and earn first-hand experiences rather than merely an observation. DMCs or travel agencies can take these expectations into consideration while designing new experiences or products for food tourism.

### 5.3.2 Adopting Practical Strategy for Culinary Tourism Marketing

In a competitive industry like tourism, there should be constant change and update in order not to fall behind the trends. First of all, technology and social media are beneficial tools to marketers. It depends on the way they take advantage of these tools for marketing purposes that catch the attention of customers. It is advisable to observe what is being favourable and popular on social media channels, regard it as a material for content making, and turn it into one's own content. Social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram are

popular and common marketing channels for the stakeholders. Besides those, a new social media platform called Tik Tok has been rising in popularity lately is proving that it can be a novel marketing channel for stakeholders who are looking for a new and creative way to deliver their content. Due to the high sense of creativity, fun and entertainment, it climbed on top 5 of the App Store chart, became the fourth most downloaded non-game app of 2018 (ahead of Instagram), and especially popular among teenagers. This app has been downloaded over 1 billion times and owns around 500 million monthly active users, and 41% of the users are from 16–24 years old. So far Tik Tok has been utilized by brands, artists, celebrities around the world as a tool to promote their new products or gain more attention and engagement from the community. (Viner 2019.) Furthermore, this channel contains a massive source of new ideas and trending interests that content writers of the marketing department can adopt for the diversification of marketing content. Overall, adopting Tik Tok as a new marketing channel may be a rational method for stakeholders and organizations in the tourism field to reach more young customers.

The survey has indicated that Vietnamese culinary tourism is still unfamiliar to many elderly tourists visiting Vietnam, as 5 people in this age group left feedback that they did not know about Vietnamese cuisine before travelling to Vietnam. It is likely that many travel agencies in Vietnam build marketing plans for mainly young and middle-aged tourists by focusing marketing on social media channels. However, elderly people above 65 years old in these modern days are more likely to take vacations and holiday trips “attributed to longer life expectancy and better life quality, especially in developed countries” (Woś & Korzeniewski 2018, 285). They take up a large part in the number of overall travellers, therefore, it is essential to build up marketing strategies to attract tourists in this age group. The survey conducted for this research also pointed out that the information sources preferred by the elderly are magazines, TV shows, or travel agency. As a result, aside from promoting culinary products on social media channels, stakeholders and organizations should also provide various alternatives sources as those so that international tourists can have more convenient ways to reach information.

### 5.3.3 Reducing Language Barriers

As English is recognized as a global language that has the most speakers in the world, its significant role is growing in many spheres including tourism. In the context of globalization today, English competency has become a valuable communication tool that facilitates tourists' travel experience in a foreign destination. The language has a significant role in the tourism industry since it helps to comprehend tourists better and offer the right experience to their needs. (Harding 2011, 10.)

The survey results have indicated that English language is still a limitation in many local regions that makes it difficult for foreign visitors to fully approach Vietnamese food. This weakness can be improved by developing a user-friendly mobile application that can provide introductions about Vietnamese cuisine and recommend prestigious eating places in popular languages such as English, Chinese and Korean. GPS navigation function could be integrated into the application to allow travellers to find the routes to local restaurants more quickly and easily. Users should be enabled to write their feedbacks below each recommended place so that future tourists can gain a clearer preview and know where to place their trust in.

Besides, local tourism websites, travel blogs and brochures should provide more information in those different languages. In doing so, independent travellers will have less difficulties in researching about the destination in advance. Signs at bus or train stations, airports should also have instructions in different languages so they can provide tourists with the clearest information, which can help decrease the inconvenience while travelling for international tourists. Nowadays, many tourist attractions in Vietnam has adopted English in their instructions. It is advisable to also apply Chinese and Korean, if possible, since the number of Chinese and Korean tourists travelling to Vietnam is rising considerably in these recent years. Above all, local people should be encouraged to brush up their English skills so that they can help foreign visitors access to Vietnamese food cultures in an easier manner.

#### 5.3.4 Tackling Food Safety, Hygiene and Overcharging Issues

In Vietnam, the governmental departments that are in charge of food safety issues include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Industry & Trade, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. They are supposed to establish an organized system for managing food safety at different levels, ranging from national ministries to local authorities in regions and cities across the country. Based on the common management system, local authorities should only grant verification and certification to food businesses and establishes that meet all required conditions of food safety and hygiene. The process of purchasing input materials should be examined thoroughly since the origin of ingredients has great impacts on the quality of food and drink that will be produced later at the establishes. It is also necessary to intensify controls over the stages of storing, preserving and processing food. Ingredients used in these establishes need to be clean, safe and contain no toxic chemicals that are not allowed according to the regulations. Governmental policies on this issue should be widely propagated to all businesses offering food and drinks in each area. The ingredients that are unclear of the origin or out of date also must be removed from the process. The organization and agency are proposed to inspect the quality of food source in these places regularly to ensure the safety and health issue for tourists. Cases that are identified to perform against the regulations should be heavily penalized to prevent similar actions in the future. (Nguyet-Viet et al. 2017.)

To improve the situation of culinary tourism in Vietnam, one of the most urgent issues that needs prompt solutions is overcharging tourists. Although these cases make up a minor fraction out of millions of businesses providing tourism services on the national scale, they are inclined to ruin the destination image in the long run. Especially in the age of booming technology and media as today, the spread of ugly behaviours and actions is very rapid and uncontrollable. As a result, to eliminate the overcharging problem, it is of great importance to set up a common tariff where different price levels are relevantly adopted to each category of the food business. A recommended initiative is to carry out regular inspection of small restaurants and food stalls in order to check whether their price remains logical and does not exceed the limit of the average. It is suggested to fine the cases of overcharging customers strictly and raise the punishment level if they continue to

repeat their offence. Aside from the intervention of the government, tourism companies and local people play an essential part in helping foreign tourists out by imparting instructions and useful tips for dealing with the unwanted situation.

#### 5.3.5 Training and Motivating Personnel

Human Resource is undoubtedly one of the most vital factors in a competitive industry like tourism, since the customers' satisfaction is the key for the development of the stakeholders. Culinary tourism is an indispensable sub-division of tourism, therefore, this sector should have highly specialized professionals, not only in tourism and cuisine but also concentrates on culinary tourism (UNWTO & Basque Culinary Center 2019, 32).

Vietnam is estimated to have 2.5 million labours in the tourism industry, which can bring about approximately 35 billion USD to the country. However, the problem lays in the lack of skilful labour with international standards in the field. Professional education focuses on theory more than practice, which is opposite to the international education method. Due to this, Vietnam students after graduating are likely to lack skills and passion compared to the students in other countries in the region. Therefore, in the trend of increasing investment in restaurants, hotels, resorts in recent years, the human resource market of Vietnam is in the risk of being taken over by the countries in the region such as Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. (CHM 2020.)

In order to develop the human resource professional skills, it is advisable for stakeholders to join hands to figure out the way to enhance the quality of educating international tourism human resource for Vietnam labour and aim for the unitedly sustainable development. This does not only supply the thirst for human resources these days but also creates competitiveness, elevates the position of Vietnam's labour in the international human resource market. Quality education demands carefully trained teachers, suitable curriculums, and up-to-date facilities. The training for culinary tourism should be disciplined, flexible and radical. Creativity and entrepreneurship should be highlighted and the latest trends in gastronomy consumption should also be studied, so that the students can utilize the knowledge and skill in the sector immediately after graduating.

Another useful method is networking, in the form of seminars, trade fairs, meetings, culinary workshops, which are relevant for training with more insights for the future employees. (UNWTO & Basque Culinary Center 2019, 32.)

#### 5.3.6 Raising Awareness and Ethics in Tourism Business

It is undeniable that regulations and laws have powerful impacts on human behaviours. However, they are still not enough to make some people respect those issues unless they are aware of their wrongs or change their attitude. Raising the awareness of individuals and businesses working in the industry is the key solution that can lead to permanent success.

A long-term solution can be forming an ethical business culture among different enterprises, merchants and retailers working in the culinary tourism field. This enables them to enhance their knowledge and sense of social responsibility towards issues related to the environment, food safety and hygiene. Individuals and businesses in the industry should be encouraged to use a safe and clean source of ingredients to process food for customers. The information about this issue can be spread through a variety of sources including media, training sessions and workshops. This contributes to raising their awareness of the influence of food safety and hygiene on visitors' experiences and their revisit intentions. Similar methods should be adopted to the issue of overcharging. Local businesses and retailers need to realize the long-term benefits of retaining customers with excellent service and honesty rather than being misled by temporary profits of ripping them off. A comprehensive understanding of successful business strategies will help some people alter their mindsets and actions as a result.

#### 5.3.7 Strengthening Relations Between Local Stakeholders and Food Establishments

In 2019, Vietnam received the award "Asia's Leading Culinary Destination", which posed both opportunities and challenges for the country (Nguyen 2020). To foster culinary tourism, there should be more culinary products and product development, as well as encouragement for the food establishments to

experiment and create more dishes with a distinctive touch of Vietnamese tourism.

According to the head of VCA, Quan Nguyen, the coherent relation between chefs and travel agencies is extremely vital in bringing out the delicacy of Vietnamese cuisine. There should also be specific planning in tour programs to introduce tourists the culinary specialities in each region, instead of serving tourists the same food in different destinations during the trip. Nguyen also stated that the chefs in Vietnam were inherited the sophistication in Vietnamese cuisine. However, it does not limit the exploitation of the endowment only, but there should be the enhancement of new value and advancement of the dishes to meet international scales and demands. Through the traits of Vietnamese cuisine described in the previous chapter, it can be seen that Vietnamese food is competitive compared to those of other South East Asia countries in cultural characteristics, attractiveness in relevant stories behind the food. Therefore, it is attentive to take advantage of this while promoting Vietnamese cuisine to the world. All in all, the collaboration of local stakeholders, organizations and food establishments is one of the key factors deciding the food image of the destination. The quality of food and tourists' food-related experiences in Vietnam can be enhanced considerably under an effective corporation and efficient management of local government. (Thanh 2020.)

#### 5.3.8 Dealing with Impacts of COVID-19 on Tourism Growth

Concerning the solutions to revive the tourism system after COVID-19, development plans are needed to be prepared from this point on. Vietnam has passed the peak of the epidemic, but the tourism industry is still in the suspending condition to maintain the safety for visitors and local people. This has caused a lot of difficulties for the economy in general and the industry in particular. Several solutions that aim to surmount the challenges and massive losses caused by the pandemic have been put forward by VNAT. (VIR 2020.)

One of the initiatives suggested is to re-establish the target market. It is proposed that Vietnam's tourism can lessen its overdependence on Chinese, American and South Korean markets by exploiting the potentiality of the Southeast Asian region.



In recent years, there has been a steady climb in the number of travellers from this market. To give an illustration, the number of visitors from Thailand rose by 4% in 2019. This has indicated the prospective growth of this emerging market to Vietnamese culinary tourism. Secondly, it is advised that the destination image and the improved quality of Vietnamese culinary tourism products continue to be promoted by launching an increasing number of promotional campaigns targeting at international travellers. Tourists' travel demand should be stimulated again through promotional strategies, offering attractive programs and packages once the pandemic comes to an end. Thirdly, linking tourism and aviation after the outbreak is another critical initiative, since the percentage of inbound visitors travel to Vietnam by airplanes account for 80%. The VNAT has prepared to work closely with the biggest airlines in the country after reopening the door to welcome foreign visitors' arrival. This appears to be a very promising solution in the Vietnamese tourism-reviving plan. (VIR 2020.)

## 6 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis was to find out inbound travellers' views on their gastronomic experiences in Vietnam. By identifying the elements affecting food-related habits and activities, the paper provided insights into the impacts of cuisine on tourists' travel experiences. In addition, the satisfaction level of foreign visitors towards food-involved activities in Vietnam was also realized through the reflection of their initial expectations and feelings or intentions after the trip. Through the glimpse of current strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese culinary tourism, the thesis indicated the opportunities and challenges that the country has. Based on this, development solutions were suggested to enhance food tourism experiences for international visitors in the future.

For the most part, the paper used qualitative methods to conduct the research. The survey was sent to multiple groups on several social platforms in order to collect qualitative data from foreign visitors around the world. There were two semi-structured interviews conducted during the methodology process. One was carried out with the commissioner and the other was done with a marketing specialist from another travel agency. The survey and interviews were all conducted online due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The situation caused several challenges during the process, which made it rather difficult to reach a massive number of survey respondents for the research. However, most travellers in the social platforms where the survey was published expressed their great interests and attempts to do the survey to the best of their knowledge. This led to the achievement of research goals thanks to various high-quality answers even though the number of the respondents were not high.

The reliability of the thesis was obtained through the use of prestigious academic sources including specialized books, journals, articles and official statistics together with the adoption of two research methods. Main findings were drawn based on previous theoretical frameworks and the analysis of the survey results, interview contents. The methods used in this paper produced mostly qualitative data, which helped to illuminate the research issue and escalate the validity of this thesis as a result.

The key results of the research showed that Vietnamese cuisine was perceived as the second greatest motivation for tourists to travel to the country. With reference to the expectations for culinary tourism in Vietnam, visiting local farms and traditional markets was the most wanted experience. The second most expected activity was participating in events or festivals related to Vietnamese food, followed by attending cooking lessons and visiting local manufacturers. A significant majority of visitors were satisfied with the culinary experiences that they had while being in Vietnam. Trying street food and dining at local restaurants received the greatest level of satisfaction thanks to the highest number of participants. The following experience that satisfied most of the participants was eating with locals at their home. The other activities consisting of cooking lessons, food events and visiting farms were found less popular due to the smaller number of participants recorded.

In general, most of the foreign visitors evaluated their overall culinary experiences in Vietnam as good. They reckoned that those experiences came up to their expectations, yet they were inadequate to go beyond what they initially longed for. Many people also agreed to share their experiences or recommend others to travel to the country for culinary experiences. The number of participants intending to revisit Vietnam for food experiences or visiting Vietnamese restaurants in their home country was also high.

As can be seen, Vietnam's tourism is on the rise and there are a lot of opportunities for culinary tourism to grow. International visitors had been most impressed with the diversity of ingredients and flavours that make the taste of Vietnamese dishes unique and unforgettable. Many of them complimented on how fresh, healthy and delicious Vietnamese food tastes, which somehow shows the potential attraction of the cuisine. Nowadays, the country has devoted a great deal of attention to the development of Vietnamese culinary tourism with high hope to promote the destination image with cuisine and attract rising numbers of foreign visitors in the next years.

Prospective as Vietnamese culinary tourism is, there are still some existent challenges and problems that may send its growth into a tailspin such as low English proficiency of locals, lack of homogeneity in quality in the restaurant

systems. Especially there are major controversies surrounding unsafe or unclean food, overcharging in local restaurants. These challenges may hold back the advance of Vietnamese food tourism unless radical and realistic solutions are adopted to remedy the current situation. In order to put an end to these issues, stakeholders at different levels need to take actions jointly. The government and local authorities have the responsibility to take control and prevent the occurrence of future problems promptly through policies and regulations. Most importantly, each individual and business working in the industry should raise awareness of the outcomes of unethical behaviours so that they can adapt their attitudes properly to the situation. Additional development ideas on promoting Vietnamese culinary tourism were also suggested together with recommendations on practical marketing strategy.

Thanks to personal interests on the research topic, the authors have been inspired to invest a long period of time and enormous endeavours in accomplishing the thesis project. The research has enabled the authors to gain more profound knowledge of the opportunities and challenges in developing culinary tourism in Vietnam. As a result, critical thinking skills have been improved and a broad understanding of the current situation has been acquired.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. E-survey Template for Culinary Tourism Experiences in Vietnam

Appendix 2. Interview Questions with Mr. Lan Nguyen – Corporate Travel Manager of Scandivina Vietnam Tour

Appendix 3. Interview Questions with Ms. Ha Truong – Sales Executive of Sens Asia Travel



## Appendix 1. E-survey Template for Culinary Tourism Experiences in Vietnam



## Developing Culinary Tourism Experience in Vietnam

This survey is a part of Lapland University of Applied Sciences Thesis Project. The research aims to examine the phenomenon of Culinary Tourism Experience in Vietnam and how it could be developed in the future.

It takes approximately 7-10 minutes to complete the survey. All answers from respondents will be kept confidential and be used only in the thesis papers.

Should any feedback or additional question about the topic arise, please kindly contact us via email:

Hang Hoang: [hang.hoang@edu.lapinamk.fi](mailto:hang.hoang@edu.lapinamk.fi)

or Linh Le: [linh.le@edu.lapinamk.fi](mailto:linh.le@edu.lapinamk.fi)

Thank you for your cooperation!

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Gender \*

- Female
- Male

Age \*

- 18-25 years old
- 26-35 years old
- 36-45 years old
- 46 years old and above

Status \*

- Single
- Married
- Other

Occupation \*

- Student
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

Where are you from? \*

Câu trả lời của bạn

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[Quay lại](#)[Tiếp](#)

## TRAVELER'S TYPOLOGY

Is this your first time traveling to Vietnam? \*

- Yes
- No

If no, this is .... time.

Câu trả lời của bạn \_\_\_\_\_

What's your motivation for traveling to Vietnam? \*

- Sceneries
- Food
- Culture
- Affordable Costs
- Work
- Entertainment
- Visiting relatives
- Mục khác: \_\_\_\_\_

Which sources do you use to seek information for planning your trip? \*

- Internet (Social Media, Websites, etc.)
- TV (Food Show, Advertisers, etc.)
- Newspaper, Magazine, Articles
- Friends, Family, Relatives
- Previous Experiences
- Brochure
- Travel Agency
- Mục khác: \_\_\_\_\_

How much percentage of travel expenses do you intend to spend on food and beverages during holiday?

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%

Do local food and drinks affect your travel decision? \*

- Yes
- No

Are you acquainted with the concept "Culinary Tourism" or traveling for the main purpose of experiencing food and drinks?

- Yes
- No

[Quay lại](#)

[Tiếp](#)

## EATING BEHAVIOR WHILE TRAVELING

For each of these statements below describing your eating behavior while traveling, please choose the extent to which you agree or disagree by ticking in the box. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I just eat when I'm hungry, no special plan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow the travel group and eat at places planned by travel agency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I choose food first, then location.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I eat at places near my accommodation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I only eat at places offering clean food.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow the travel group and eat at places planned by travel agency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I choose food first, then location.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I eat at places near my accommodation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I only eat at places offering clean food.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I eat food similar to what I eat at home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I look for places that are crowded and frequently visited by locals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often read reviews before making decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important are these elements to your food experience at the destination? \*

	Not important at all	Not very important	Neutral	Important	Very important
Good taste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Locality and authenticity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good value for money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decoration and ambiance of the venue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visual appearance of the dish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Popularity of the dish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wide availability and variety of food choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning about another culture through food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



For each of these statements below describing your post-travel behavior, please indicate to which extent you agree or disagree by ticking in the box. \*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The food experience in Vietnam came up to my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The food experience in Vietnam went beyond my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would revisit the destination for food experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to learn more about the food I ate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would visit restaurants serving Vietnamese food when I return home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would want to learn to cook the dishes I tried after returning home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would buy local ingredients or food as souvenirs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would share my food experiences with others after the trip	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend others to visit Vietnam to experience the cuisine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



I would share  
my food  
experiences  
with others  
after the trip

I would  
recommend  
others to visit  
Vietnam to  
experience the  
cuisine

I had an overall  
positive  
satisfaction  
towards food  
experience in  
Vietnam

What do you think about Culinary Tourism Experience in Vietnam and how it could be developed in the future?

Câu trả lời của bạn

[Quay lại](#)

[Tiếp](#)

What do you think about Culinary Tourism Experience in Vietnam and how it could be developed in the future?

Văn bản trả lời dài

Sau phần 4 Tiếp tục tới phần tiếp theo

Phần 5 / 5

**Thank you for your participation!**



We really appreciate your help! Hope you have a nice day!

Appendix 2. Interview Questions with Mr. Lan Nguyen – Corporate Travel Manager of ScandiVina Vietnam Tour

1. Could you please introduce briefly about you and your company?
2. What is the business idea of your company? Can you share a bit about the company's vision and goals?
3. What is the company's target group? Where do they usually come from?
4. Does your company design customized tour programs according to customers' demand or only sell available-made products?
5. What do you think about the role of food in Vietnamese tourism market?
6. What do you think about the emerging trend of food tours in Vietnam in recent years?
7. In your opinion, what are characteristics or special features of Vietnamese cuisine?
8. Among the products currently offered by your company, are there any of them culinary or food-focused?
9. In your opinion, what kind of opportunities and challenges in Vietnamese culinary tourism nowadays?
10. Do you think food tour programs can help highlight competitive advantage for your company among crowded markets?
11. Do you think travellers are willing to pay for these customized food tours or prefer to explore culinary experiences on their own?
12. With the globally widespread outbreak of Coronavirus at the moment, what challenges and threats are being posed to Vietnamese tourism market in general and your company in particular?

Appendix 3. Interview Questions with Ms. Ha Truong – Sales Executive of Sens Asia Travel

1. Could you introduce briefly about your company?
2. Which unique characteristics of Hanoi cuisine that foreign tourists often find appealing? How do they vary among regions?
3. In your opinion, what makes Vietnamese street food appear attractive to international tourists?
4. What culinary tourism product is currently offered in the company?
5. Does the company's culinary product have any outstanding feature compared to other competitors? If yes, how does your company highlight it?
6. What kind of activities does Sens Asia Travel's food tour consist of?
7. Does the company plan to include additional elements in the current food tour or design different culinary experiences in the future?
8. What are the major problems for developing Vietnamese culinary tourism?
9. What does Sens Asia Travel do to affirm the quality of food tours concerning food safety and hygiene standards?
10. What will your company do to help future tourists get rid of worries about their culinary experiences in Vietnam?
11. What kind of solutions can be taken to deal with the food safety issues in Vietnam?