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CULINARY JOURNEY: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF AUTHENTIC GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCES IN WEST SUMATRA, INDONESIA

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Abstract:

Gastronomic tourism has become a global phenomenon where tasting local cuisine is a key reason people travel. West Sumatra, Indonesia, renowned for its rich Minangkabau culinary heritage and culture, serves as an ideal destination for those seeking authentic food experiences. Although Padang restaurants are well-known internationally, the true Minangkabau culinary experience is best enjoyed in its place of origin. This study compares the effects of gastronomic motivation and local food authenticity on authentic culinary experiences and tourist satisfaction among both domestic and international visitors in West Sumatra. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model and data from 198 respondents, the results indicate that for domestic tourists, authentic culinary experience mediates the relationship between food authenticity and satisfaction, while gastronomic motivation does not have a significant indirect effect. Conversely, for international tourists, both factors have significant direct and indirect effects on satisfaction through authentic culinary experience. These findings highlight the importance of authenticity and active engagement in shaping tourist satisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended that destination management strategies focus on authenticity and cultural storytelling for international visitors, while enhancing interactive experiences for domestic tourists. This research offers valuable insights for developing more effective gastronomic tourism strategies.

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**Keywords:**

Gastronomic motivation, Local Food Authenticity, Authentic Culinary Experience, Tourist Satisfaction

Introduction

Gastronomic tourism has emerged as a prominent trend worldwide, with food now serving as a primary motivation and integral aspect of memorable travel experiences (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Rivza et al., 2022). In West Sumatra, the rich flavors and cultural heritage of Minangkabau cuisine have captivated both domestic and international visitors, establishing the region as a prime destination for authentic culinary adventures. Despite this, there is still a scarcity of quantitative research examining how factors such as the desire to sample local dishes, the distinctiveness of regional foods, and the authenticity of culinary experiences collectively shape tourist satisfaction—particularly in the context of Indonesia’s traditional cuisines (Mardatillah, 2020).

Although Minangkabau cuisine has gained widespread recognition through Padang restaurants found throughout Indonesia and internationally, there remains a substantial distinction between tasting Padang food outside its homeland and truly experiencing its culinary richness within the original cultural and environmental setting. This disparity poses a significant challenge for the advancement of culinary tourism in West Sumatra, particularly in balancing the preservation of authenticity with the diverse expectations of tourists from various cultural backgrounds and culinary experiences. Addressing this issue becomes increasingly crucial as competition among culinary tourism destinations intensifies both within Indonesia and across Southeast Asia (Wondirad et al., 2021).

Tourists today are increasingly driven to explore local food not only for its unique flavors but also to connect with cultural heritage through dining experiences (Sthapit et al., 2023). This trend is reflected in Minangkabau’s culinary traditions, where age-old cooking methods, locally sourced ingredients, and communal bajamba meals offer rich cultural narratives (Lipoeto et al., 2001).

This study compares local and foreign tourists for three important reasons: First, the two groups have different cultural backgrounds and perspectives in assessing the authenticity of Minangkabau cuisine—locals evaluate it based on generational knowledge, while foreigners compare it with global culinary experiences (Zhang et al., 2019). Second, previous studies show that culinary motivations and responses to local food differ significantly between domestic and international tourists (Zhang et al., 2019). Third, the comparison results will provide valuable insights for targeted marketing strategies and culinary experiences tailored to each group’s preferences (Hornig & Tsai, 2012).

This study uses multi-group quantitative analysis to compare how domestic and foreign tourists in West Sumatra perceive culinary authenticity, motivations, and satisfaction. The findings will help refine gastronomic tourism strategies for marketers and local food businesses.

Literature Review

Gastronomic Motivation

refers to the driving force behind individuals', particularly tourists', pursuit of food-based experiences during their travels. This motivation encompasses both primary and secondary reasons for travel, including sampling regional cuisine, exploring food heritage, and participating in culinary activities. Rooted in food's cultural, sensory, and social aspects, gastronomic motivation significantly influences travel decisions, from destination selection to dining choices (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019).

The reasons driving tourists to explore a destination's gastronomy can be categorized into four types: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status/prestige motives. Physical motives view gastronomy as merely fulfilling the essential human need for nourishment. Cultural motives involve tourists' aims to comprehend a destination's heritage and local culinary traditions. Interpersonal motives encompass the social desire for connections with others, with gastronomy serving as a tool to foster such interactions. Status and prestige motives are rooted in the social significance derived from personal culinary experiences (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021).

Local Food Authenticity

local food Authenticity plays a fundamental role as a precursor in the framework linking quality, satisfaction, and loyalty within food tourism, with tourist satisfaction and loyalty depending on their perception of rural local food's authenticity (Zhang et al., 2019). Local food authenticity plays a crucial role in enriching the sustainable tourism experience by fostering a deep connection between tourists and the regions they visit, encompassing the richness of culture and traditional heritage, while also offering fresh and innovative perspectives for the advancement of tourism research in the future (Sims, 2009)

Local food authenticity is perceived as rooted in tradition, place, and craftsmanship, enhances tourist and consumer satisfaction by connecting people to regional culture and heritage, but can be challenged by adaptation for broader appeal and practical sourcing issues, sometimes leading to changes or loss of original authenticity (Chousou & Mattas, 2019; Nunes et al., 2021) Genuine local cuisine is crucial in enhancing tourism, as its authenticity adds unique value that contributes to the satisfaction of tourists visiting the area

Authentic Culinary Experience

Authentic culinary experience describes a food-related encounter that tourists view as a genuine embodiment of a destination's cultural heritage, traditions, and identity, showcasing authenticity through the cuisine, its presentation, the surrounding atmosphere, and associated social engagements. Such an experience often includes enjoying local dishes deeply tied to the area's cultural legacy, delivered in a setting that reflects the authentic lifestyle of the local people, thereby offering profound understanding of the region's distinct character (S. Graham, 2020; Walter, 2017; Wondirad et al., 2021).

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist Satisfaction related to Gastronomic Experience refers to The tourists' perceived satisfaction level regarding their gastronomic encounters during travel, encompassing various aspects such as food quality, culinary authenticity, dining ambiance, social interactions, and

the cultural value derived from the experience. This satisfaction is influenced by the extent to which the gastronomic experience meets or exceeds tourists' expectations, often closely tied to factors such as the authenticity, uniqueness, and cultural relevance of the food and its presentation context (Ángeles López-Cabarcos et al., 2022; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021).

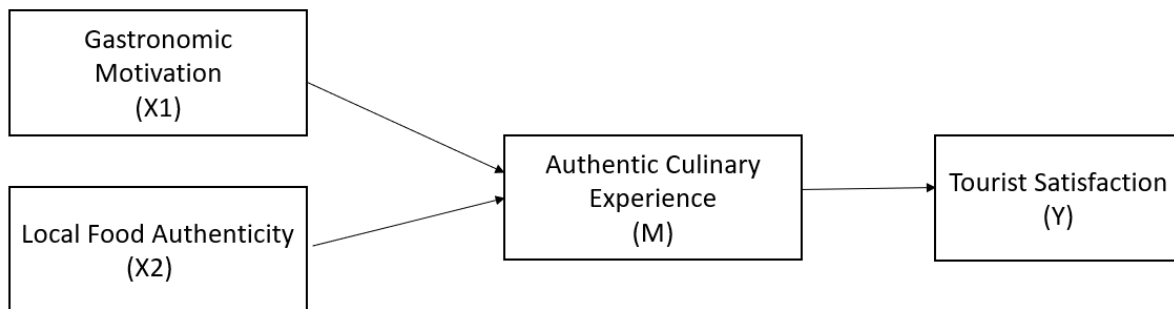


Figure 1. Framework

This framework adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory to analyze how gastronomic motivation (X1) and local food authenticity (X2) act as external stimuli, influencing authentic culinary experience (M) as an internal psychological process (organism), ultimately leading to tourist satisfaction (Y) as a behavioral response. Grounded in (Jacoby, 2002) theory, tourist motivations (e.g., cultural or sensory appeal) and food authenticity (e.g., local ingredients or traditional cooking methods) stimulate perceptions of authentic culinary experiences, which then shape satisfaction through evaluations of service quality, ambiance, and pricing. The mediator (M) serves as a bridge that transforms external stimuli into emotional decision-making, aligning with studies by (S. C. Graham, 2021) and (Zhang et al., 2019), while satisfaction (Y) is measured using attributes from (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021). This framework is suitable for testing with structural equation modeling (SEM) to confirm causal relationships among variables. Five hypotheses were proposed as follows:

- H1:** Gastronomic influence has a positive effect on authentic culinary experience.
- H2:** Local food authenticity has a positive effect on authentic culinary experience.
- H3:** Gastronomic motivation has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, mediated by authentic culinary experience.
- H4:** Local food authenticity has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, mediated by authentic culinary experience.
- H5:** Gastronomic motivation and local food authenticity have a joint positive effect on tourist satisfaction, mediated by authentic culinary experience.

Methodology

This study's target population comprises all international tourist arrivals (N=69,202) recorded at Minangkabau International Airport during the 2024 calendar year. This sampling frame represents the total accessible population for research on West Sumatra's international visitor segment

Table 1. Tourist Arrival Data

MONTH	TOURISM
Januari	4.689
February	8.228
March	2.976
April	7.166
May	7.107
June	4.631
July	5.936
August	6.685
September	8.232
Oktober	7.511
November	6.041
December	7.55
Sum	69.202

Source: <https://sumbar.bps.go.id/>

This study employs Slovin's formula to determine the minimum required sample size from the population of 69,202 international tourists. The formula is applied with:

$$n = \frac{69.202}{1 + 69.202 \cdot (0,1)^2} \approx 99$$

The sample used was 99 foreign tourists and 99 local tourists.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through questionnaires handed directly to tourists at several popular attractions in Padang, Padang Panjang, and Bukittinggi. The survey was conducted in person, with the main researcher and five assistants approaching both local and international visitors in public spaces such as cultural landmarks, food centers, and traditional markets. Prior to participation, we introduced ourselves as researchers and briefly outlined the study's aim to explore culinary experiences and tourist satisfaction in West Sumatra. Participation was completely voluntary, and we clearly obtained consent from each tourist, assuring them that their answers would be kept confidential and used only for academic research. Completing the questionnaire took about 15 to 20 minutes, during which the research team was available on-site to clarify any questions or provide help. The data collection spanned 15 days, from May 29 to June 13, 2025, with five research assistants managing questionnaire distribution to maintain data consistency and quality.

Instrument

To maintain methodological rigor, we derived all survey variables from established key literature. These variables were systematically evaluated through discussions with our supervisor to verify their appropriateness for the research context

Table 2. Key Constructs in Gastronomic Tourism Research

Construct	Definition/Measurement Items	Reference
Gastronomic Motivation	Includes cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relationships, health concern, and sensory appeal.	(Kim et al., 2013)
Tourist Satisfaction	Evaluation of local gastronomic attributes: dish quality, presentation, price, facilities, ambiance, innovation, service, and traditions.	(Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021)
Food Authenticity	Measured by 9 items: Ingredients sourced locally, Distinctive cooking techniques, Traditional regional flavors, Unique traditional cookware, Regional cuisine, Long-standing culinary traditions, Food customs of the local community, Local dining practices, Sharing meals with local people	(Zhang et al., 2019)
Authentic Culinary Experience	Perceptions, experiences, and elements deemed authentic by locals in culinary tourism	(S. C. Graham, 2021)

Data Analysis

Description of Local Tourist Respondents:

This study included 99 domestic tourists with the following demographic characteristics. The largest age group was 18-25 years (35.4%), followed by 26-35 years (28.3%), 36-45 years (20.2%), and those above 45 years (16.1%). Male respondents slightly outnumbered females (52.5% vs 47.5%). Occupationally, students comprised the largest group (30.3%), followed by office workers (25.3%), entrepreneurs (22.2%), and other professions including civil servants and freelancers (22.2%).

Description of Foreign Tourist Respondents:

The study also examined 99 international tourists with distinct characteristics. The 26-35 age group was most prevalent (40.4%), followed by 18-25 years (28.3%), 36-45 years (18.2%), and those over 45 (13.1%). Unlike domestic tourists, female travelers slightly predominated (51.5% vs 48.5%). Their occupations were more varied, with professionals (e.g., engineers, consultants) forming the largest category (45.5%), followed by students (20.2%), digital nomads (15.2%), and other groups like backpackers (19.1%). The digital nomad category represents the unique segment of remote workers who combine travel with their professional activities

Table 3. Description of Local Tourist Respondents

Variable	Description	Sum	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	35	35.40%
	26-35	28	28.30%
	36-45	20	20.20%
	>45	16	16.10%
Sex	Male	52	52.50%
	Female	47	47.50%
Profession	Student	30	30.30%
	Office Worker	25	25.30%
	Entrepreneur	22	22.20%
	Self Employee	22	22.20%

Table 4. Description of Foreign Tourist Respondents

Variable	Description	Sum	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	28	28.30%
	26-35	40	40.40%
	36-45	18	18.20%
	>45	13	13.10%
Sex	Male	48	48.50%
	Female	51	51.50%
Profession	Professional	45	45.50%
	Students	20	20.20%
	Freelancer	15	15.20%
	Others	19	19.10%

Result

Local Tourist Respondents

For measurement validation, this study conducted a series of instrument quality tests. The initial phase focused on examining VIF values with criteria of < 5.0 and tolerance > 0.1 to minimize common method bias (Hair et al., 2020; Kock, 2015). Subsequent testing included validity and reliability assessments using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha with a minimum threshold of 0.7, and loading factors with a threshold of 0.6. Two items in deep acting that did not meet the criteria were removed from the analysis. Discriminant validity was tested using the square root of AVE, cross-loading, and HTMT criteria with a threshold of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001; Henseler et al., 2015). The test results indicated that all validity and reliability criteria were met, as evidenced by the values presented

The results of data processing for Hypothesis 1 (local tourists) revealed that 5 items (G1, G4, L1, L2, L9) were invalid due to outer loading values <0.6 . However, the values from Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) tests all met the required thresholds, as detailed in the following table 5.

Table 5. Outer Model Test Result

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
M	0.764	0.79	0.849	0.586
X1	0.895	0.918	0.927	0.761
X2	0.887	0.886	0.915	0.644
Y	0.948	0.953	0.957	0.735

The psychometric evaluation confirmed the robustness of all study constructs: Gastronomic Motivation (X1), Local Food Authenticity (X2), Authentic Culinary Experience (M), and Tourist Satisfaction (Y)

Table 6. Inner Model Test Result

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
M -> Y	0.439	0.455	0.157	2.795	0.005
X1 -> M	0.170	0.179	0.063	2.684	0.008
X1 -> Y	-0.093	-0.097	0.128	0.730	0.466
X2 -> M	0.748	0.750	0.049	15.400	0.000
X2 -> Y	-0.116	-0.127	0.156	0.745	0.457
X1 -> M -> Y	0.075	0.083	0.040	1.886	0.060
X2 -> M -> Y	0.328	0.342	0.118	2.790	0.005

The analysis results for local tourists show that:

1. Authentic Culinary Experience has a significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($p = 0.005$; $\beta = 0.439$; $t = 2.795$).
2. Gastronomic Motivation has a positive and significant effect on Authentic Culinary Experience ($p = 0.008$; $\beta = 0.170$; $t = 2.684$), but its direct effect on Tourist Satisfaction is not significant ($p = 0.466$; $\beta = -0.093$; $t = 0.730$).
3. Local Food Authenticity has a significant effect on Authentic Culinary Experience ($p = 0.000$; $\beta = 0.748$; $t = 15.400$), but its direct effect on Tourist Satisfaction is also not significant ($p = 0.457$; $\beta = -0.116$; $t = 0.745$).
4. The path from Gastronomic Motivation influence to Authentic Culinary Experience mediated Tourist Satisfaction is not significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.060$; $\beta = 0.075$; $t = 1.886$).
5. However, the path from Local Food Authenticity influence Authentic Culinary Experience mediated Tourist Satisfaction is significant ($p = 0.005$; $\beta = 0.328$; $t = 2.790$)

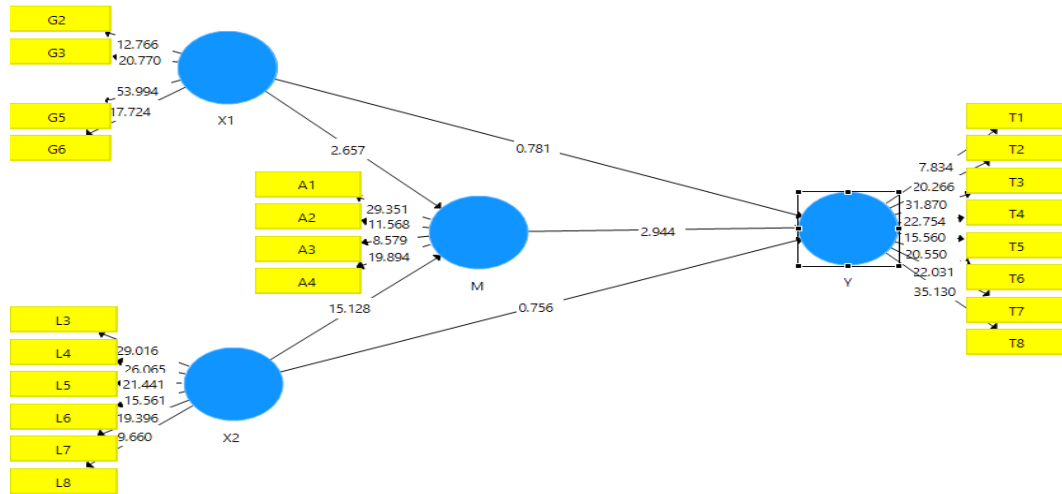


Figure 2. Structural Analysis Local Tourist Respondents

Foreign Tourist Respondents

The results of data processing for Hypothesis 2 (foreign tourists) showed that 5 items (G1, G4, L1, L2, L9) were invalid due to outer loading values <0.6, while the values from Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) tests all met the required thresholds as detailed in the following table 7.

Table 7. Outer Model Test Result

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
M	0.764	0.773	0.850	0.587
X1	0.895	0.919	0.927	0.760
X2	0.892	0.893	0.919	0.656
Y	0.892	0.894	0.914	0.571

The psychometric evaluation confirmed the robustness of all study constructs: Gastronomic Motivation (X1), Local Food Authenticity (X2), Authentic Culinary Experience (M), and Tourist Satisfaction (Y)

Table 8. Inner Model Test Result

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
M -> Y	0.772	0.770	0.077	10.067	0.000
X1 -> M	0.162	0.169	0.066	2.442	0.015
X1 -> Y	-0.022	-0.021	0.039	0.551	0.582
X2 -> M	0.743	0.741	0.051	14.533	0.000

X2 -> Y	0.188	0.192	0.088	2.147	0.032
X1 -> M -> Y	0.130	0.137	0.051	2.561	0.011
X2 -> M -> Y	0.564	0.561	0.072	7.842	0.000

1. Authentic Culinary Experience has a significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($p = 0.000$; $\beta = 0.772$; $t = 10.067$)
2. Gastronomic Motivation has a positive and significant effect on Authentic Culinary Experience ($p=0.015$; $\beta=0.162$; $t = 2.442$), but its direct effect on Tourist Satisfaction is not significant ($p = 0.582$; $\beta = -0.022$; $t = 0.551$)
3. Local Food Authenticity has a significant effect on Authentic Culinary Experience ($p = 0.000$; $\beta = 0.743$; $t = 14.533$), and also has a significant direct effect on Tourist Satisfaction ($p = 0.032$; $\beta = 0.188$; $t = 2.147$)
4. The path Gastronomic Motivation influence to Authentic Culinary Experience mediated Tourist Satisfaction is significant ($p = 0.011$; $\beta = 0.130$; $t = 2.561$)
5. The path Local Food Authenticity influence Authentic Culinary Experience mediated Tourist Satisfaction is significant ($p = 0.000$; $\beta = 0.564$; $t = 7.842$)

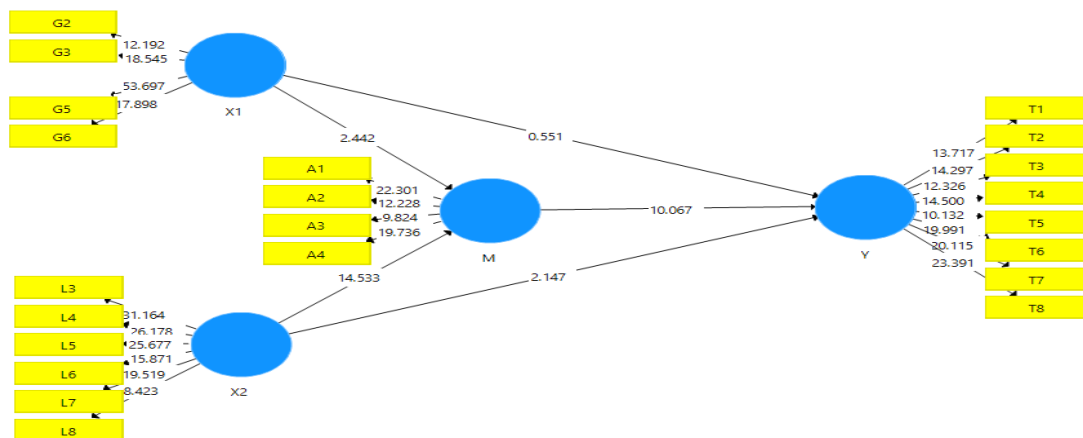


Figure 3. Structural Analysis

Discussion

Culinary tourism is now increasingly recognized as an important element in shaping the experiences and satisfaction of both domestic and foreign tourists. This study compares the influence of gastronomic motivation and local food authenticity on authentic culinary experience and tourist satisfaction among these two tourist segments.

The analysis results show that for domestic tourists, authentic culinary experience serves as a significant mediator between local food authenticity and tourist satisfaction, while the indirect effect of gastronomic motivation through authentic culinary experience on tourist satisfaction is not significant. The direct effect of local food authenticity on tourist satisfaction is also not significant, indicating that satisfaction is more influenced by authentic culinary experiences rather than mere perceptions of food authenticity. These findings align with the concept of co-creation experience (Campos et al., 2018), which emphasizes that active tourist involvement in the culinary experience process such as interactions with local culinary practitioners or participation in cooking activities plays an important role in shaping satisfaction, going beyond just product attributes.

Conversely, for foreign tourists, both the direct effect of local food authenticity on tourist satisfaction and its indirect effect through authentic culinary experience are significant. This indicates that the authenticity of local food not only enriches authentic culinary experiences but also directly enhances foreign tourists' satisfaction. Additionally, gastronomic motivation exerts a significant indirect effect on tourist satisfaction through authentic culinary experience. These findings are supported by foodscape theory (Ellis et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023), which posits that perceptions of local food's uniqueness, authenticity, and social context play a crucial role in shaping tourists' experiences and satisfaction, particularly for international tourists seeking experiences distinct from their daily lives.

The differing results between these two tourist groups suggest that culinary destination development strategies need customization. For foreign tourists, emphasis on authenticity and cultural culinary narratives is essential, while for domestic tourists, interactive experiences with active participation may be key to enhancing satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study highlights the differences and similarities in the influence of gastronomic motivation and local food authenticity on authentic culinary experience and tourist satisfaction in local and foreign tourists. The results of the analysis show that for local tourists, satisfaction is highly influenced by the authentic culinary experience they feel, while the perception of food authenticity does not directly increase satisfaction. In contrast, for foreign tourists, both the authenticity of local food and the authentic culinary experience are proven to play a significant role in increasing their satisfaction during their trip. This finding confirms the importance of authentic culinary experience as a mediator, especially in the relationship between local food authenticity and tourist satisfaction in both groups of tourists. Based on these results, culinary tourism destination managers are expected to adjust their development and marketing strategies, by highlighting the authenticity and narrative of culinary culture for foreign tourists and enriching interactive experiences for local tourists, in order to increase satisfaction and the attractiveness of culinary destinations sustainably.

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