Measurement of Tourists Perception and Preferences towards Culinary Tourism: An Empirical Investigation

Subir Kumar Malakar, G Ramanaiah, Ruchika Kulshrestha

Abstract- Culinary tourism, also known as food tourism, is a type of tourism that focuses on the exploration of food and drink in a particular region or country. It involves experiencing local cuisine, visiting markets, farms, and wineries, and learning about food culture and traditions. The impact of culinary tourism on tourism development can be significant, as it can attract more visitors, enhance the local economy, and promote cultural exchange. Here are some of the ways culinary tourism can impact tourism development: Increased tourism revenue: culinary tourism can attract more visitors to a destination, leading to increased tourism revenue. Tourists are often willing to pay a premium to experience local cuisine and culinary traditions, which can generate additional income for local businesses and restaurants. Development of food-related infrastructure: The growth of culinary tourism can lead to the development of new food-related infrastructure, such as restaurants, food markets, cooking schools, and food tours. In this context, present study investigates perception and preferences of tourists about different aspects of tourism in West Bengal. Findings suggested that tourists have varied positive perception and preferences towards different components of culinary tourism and in favour of branding and promoting of food in the area.

Keywords: Tourists, Perception, Preferences, Culinary Tourism, Independent sample t-test.

I. INTRODUCTION

India has a rich and diverse culinary heritage that is influenced by its geography, history, and culture. Indian cuisine is known for its variety of spices and flavors, and it is popular all over the world. The cuisine of India can be broadly categorized into four regions - North, South, East, and West. Each region has its own unique style of cooking and distinct flavors. In the North, the food is influenced by Mughlai cuisine and is known for its rich, creamy curries and kebabs. Some popular dishes from this region include butter chicken, tandoori chicken, biryani, and naan. In the South, the cuisine is characterized by the use of coconut, curry leaves, and tamarind. Rice is a staple in this region, and some popular dishes include dosa, idli, sambar, and rasam. In the East, the cuisine is known for its use of mustard oil, fish, and rice. Some popular dishes from this region include macher jhol (fish curry), cholar dal (chana dal), and luchi (deep-fried bread). In the West, the cuisine is influenced by Gujarati, Rajasthani, and Maharashtrian cuisine. Some popular dishes from this region include vada pav, pav bhaji, dhokla, and thepla. Overall, Indian cuisine is a reflection of the country's diverse cultural and regional influences, and it continues to evolve and innovate with time. There have been several recent developments in the food industry in India, reflecting the changing tastes and preferences of consumers. Here are a few notable ones:

1. Health and wellness: With an increasing focus on healthy living, there has been a rise in demand for healthier food options. This has led to the introduction of new food products and ingredients, such as millets, quinoa, and plant-based meat substitutes.

2. Sustainability: Consumers are becoming more aware of the impact of food production on the environment and are seeking sustainable food options. This has led to the popularity of locally sourced and organic food, and a growing interest in plant-based diets.

3. Fusion cuisine: Indian chefs are increasingly experimenting with fusion cuisine, blending traditional Indian flavors with global ingredients and cooking techniques. This has led to the popularity of dishes such as butter chicken pizza, biryani burritos, and Indian-style burgers.

4. Online food delivery: With the rise of food delivery apps such as Swiggy and Zomato, consumers can order food from a wide range of restaurants and cuisines, from the comfort of their homes. This has led to a boom in the food delivery industry, with new players entering the market and offering innovative services such as meal subscriptions and curated food experiences.

Overall, the food industry in India is evolving rapidly, driven by changing consumer preferences and technological advancements. West Bengal, located in the eastern region of India, has a rich culinary heritage that reflects its history, geography, and culture. The cuisine of West Bengal is heavily influenced by its proximity to the sea and the fertile alluvial plains of the Ganges river. One of the defining features of Bengali cuisine is its emphasis on vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, with a wide variety of seafood, vegetables, and meats. Rice is the staple food, and is often accompanied by lentils or vegetables. Some popular dishes from West Bengal include:

1. Fish curry: Fish is a staple in Bengali cuisine, and fish curry or macher jhol is a popular dish. It is typically made with mustard oil, onions, tomatoes, and a blend of spices, and is served with rice.
(2) Prawn malai curry: This is a creamy and mildly spiced dish made with coconut milk and prawns, and is a popular dish in the coastal regions of West Bengal.

(3) Luchi and cholar dal: Luchi is a deep-fried bread made with flour, while cholar dal is a lentil-based dish that is spiced with cinnamon, bay leaves, and ginger. This is a popular breakfast dish in West Bengal.

(4) Rasgulla: This is a famous Bengali sweet made with cottage cheese and sugar syrup, and is a popular dessert across India.

II. Literature Review

Culinary tourism, also known as food tourism, is a type of tourism that focuses on the exploration of food and drink in a particular region or country. It involves experiencing local cuisine, visiting markets, farms, and wineries, and learning about food culture and traditions. The impact of culinary tourism on tourism development can be significant, as it can attract more visitors, enhance the local economy, and promote cultural exchange. Here are some of the ways culinary tourism can impact tourism development:

- Increased tourism revenue: Culinary tourism can attract more visitors to a destination, leading to increased tourism revenue. Tourists are often willing to pay a premium to experience local cuisine and culinary traditions, which can generate additional income for local businesses and restaurants (Doolin et al., 2002; Zadeh and Sharda, 2014). Development of food-related infrastructure: The growth of culinary tourism can lead to the development of new food-related infrastructure, such as restaurants, food markets, cooking schools, and food tours. This can create new job opportunities, and contribute to the overall economic development of the region.

- Promotion of local food culture: Culinary tourism can help promote and preserve local food culture and traditions, which can be a valuable asset for a destination. Local cuisine can also become a source of pride for the local community and can help to distinguish a destination from others. Promotion of sustainable agriculture: Culinary tourism can also promote sustainable agriculture and food production. By showcasing local farmers and producers, culinary tourism can support sustainable practices and help to preserve the environment. Cultural exchange: Culinary tourism can promote cultural exchange and understanding. By experiencing local cuisine, tourists can learn about the history, traditions, and values of a destination, which can lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of local culture. Overall, culinary tourism can have a positive impact on tourism development by attracting more visitors, enhancing the local economy, and promoting cultural exchange and understanding. It can also help to preserve and promote local food culture and traditions, and support sustainable agriculture and food production.

West Bengal is a state in eastern India that has a rich culinary tradition and a diverse range of cuisine. From street food to fine dining, there are many opportunities for culinary tourism in the state. Here are some perspectives on culinary tourism in West Bengal: Bengali Cuisine: Bengali cuisine is one of the major attractions for culinary tourism in West Bengal. It is known for its unique blend of spices, flavors, and cooking techniques. Many of the popular dishes include fish curry, vegetable dishes, and sweets like rasgulla and sandesh. Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, is known for its street food, which includes rolls, chops, and cutlets. Tea Tourism: West Bengal is also known for its tea plantations, particularly in the Darjeeling and Dooars regions. Tea tourism has become a popular attraction in recent years, with visitors being able to visit tea gardens, learn about tea production, and taste different types of tea. Food Festivals: West Bengal hosts many food festivals throughout the year, which showcase the state's culinary traditions. Some of the popular food festivals include Durga Puja food festival, Kolkata Food Festival, and Poush Mela. Cooking Classes: There are many opportunities for visitors to learn about Bengali cuisine by taking cooking classes. These classes can be found in restaurants, cooking schools, and in private homes. Cultural Significance: Bengali cuisine is not only about the food, but also about the cultural significance. Many of the dishes are associated with festivals and rituals, such as sweets during Durga Puja and Holi, and fish curry during weddings. Overall, West Bengal has a lot to offer for culinary tourism. With its rich Bengali cuisine, tea plantations, food festivals, cooking classes, and cultural significance, it can be a unique and exciting destination for food lovers. Developing food tourism involves creating an environment that is conducive to experiencing local cuisine, highlighting the cultural significance of food, and promoting food-related activities and events. Here are some steps that can be taken to develop food tourism:

- Identify Local Food Specialties: Identify the local food specialties that are unique to the region or destination. This can include traditional dishes, street food, and local produce. Highlighting these specialties can create a sense of pride and identity for the local community and attract visitors who are interested in experiencing authentic cuisine.

- Create Food Trails and Tours: Create food trails and tours that take visitors on a journey through local markets, restaurants, and farms. These tours can include cooking classes, wine and cheese tastings, and visits to food festivals and events.

- Promote Local Food Culture: Promote the local food culture by highlighting the history and cultural significance of local cuisine. This can involve showcasing the traditional techniques and ingredients used in cooking, as well as the rituals and festivals that are associated with food.

- Support Local Producers: Support local food producers by featuring their products in restaurants, markets, and events. This can help to build a sustainable local food system, and ensure that visitors have access to fresh, locally sourced food.

- Collaborate with Local Businesses and Organizations: Collaborate with local businesses and organizations to create food-related events and activities. This can include food festivals, cooking competitions, and farm-to-table dinners.

- Use Social Media to Promote Food Tourism: Use social media platforms to promote food tourism by sharing pictures and stories of local cuisine, restaurants, and events.

III. Data Analysis and Results

In order to measure responses and level of agreement of tourists (domestic and international) towards their perception and preferences while visiting the study area and to test the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1 Tourists have positive culinary
perception before visiting the study area” and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal”. Culinary tourism refers to the travel experience that involves the exploration of food and drink culture in a particular region or country. The perception of culinary tourists towards a destination can be influenced by a variety of factors, including: Authenticity: Culinary tourists often seek authentic and unique food experiences that reflect the local culture and history. They may perceive a destination positively if they feel that the food and drink offerings are genuine and not overly commercialized. Diversity: Culinary tourists may be interested in exploring a range of different cuisines and local specialties. A destination that offers a diverse range of food and drink options may be perceived more positively. Quality: The quality of food and drink offerings can significantly impact a culinary tourist’s perception of a destination. High-quality, fresh, and locally sourced ingredients, as well as skilled preparation and presentation, can contribute to a positive perception. Accessibility: Culinary tourists may prefer destinations that are easily accessible and offer a range of accommodation and transportation options to facilitate their food exploration. Price: The cost of food and drink offerings can also influence a culinary tourist’s perception of a destination. They may perceive a destination negatively if the prices are too high or feel that they are not getting value for their money. Overall, the perception of culinary tourists towards a destination is influenced by the authenticity, diversity, quality, accessibility, and price of the food and drink offerings. A destination that is perceived positively by culinary tourists can benefit from increased tourism and economic benefits.

### Table 1 Responses and agreement of tourists towards their perception and preference about culinary tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Hypothesize Mean</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourists</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38.29</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>11.71</td>
<td>34.01</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source- Primary Data**

Table 1 shows that sample mean of total tourists’ (N=500) responses and agreements levels are listed in above table which significant different from each other. The proposed mean is the value that is suggested or hypothesized as the average of a given population. It is usually based on prior knowledge or assumptions about the population, such as past data or theoretical expectations. The actual mean, on the other hand, is the true average value of a sample or population. It is calculated by summing up all the values and dividing by the number of observations. The difference between the proposed mean and the actual mean can provide insight into the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis or assumptions. If the proposed mean is close to the actual mean, it suggests that the assumptions were reasonable and the data supports the hypothesis. If the proposed mean is significantly different from the actual mean, it may indicate that the initial assumptions were incorrect, and further investigation or analysis is required. Therefore, the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1 Tourists have positive culinary perception before visiting the study area” got accepted and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” has been achieved.

### Table 2 Level of agreement category of tourists towards culinary perception and preferences while visiting the study area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From table 2 and Graph 1, it is clear that tourists have high level of agreement towards culinary perception and preferences, as sample mean (38.39) fall under high level of agreement category (31-40). In order to measure responses and level of agreement of domestic tourists towards perception and preference while visiting the study area and to test the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1.1 Domestic tourists have positive culinary perception before visiting the study area “and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” Culinary tourism refers to the travel experience that involves the exploration of food and drink culture in a particular region or country. The perception of culinary tourists towards a destination can be influenced by a variety of factors, including: Authenticity: Culinary tourists often seek authentic and unique food experiences that reflect the local culture and history. They may perceive a destination positively if they feel that the food and drink offerings are genuine and not overly commercialized. Diversity: Culinary tourists may be interested in exploring a range of different cuisines and local specialties. A destination that offers a diverse range of food and drink options may be perceived more positively. Quality: The quality of food and drink offerings can significantly impact a culinary tourist’s perception of a destination. High-quality, fresh, and locally sourced ingredients, as well as skilled preparation and presentation, can contribute to a positive perception. Accessibility: Culinary tourists may prefer destinations that are easily accessible and offer a range of accommodation and transportation options to facilitate their food exploration. Price: The cost of food and drink offerings can also influence a culinary tourist’s perception of a destination. They may perceive a destination negatively if the prices are too high or feel that they are not getting value for their money. Overall, the perception of culinary tourists towards a destination is influenced by the authenticity, diversity, quality, accessibility, and price of the food and drink offerings. A destination that is perceived positively by culinary tourists can benefit from increased tourism and economic benefits.

Table 3 Responses and agreement of domestic tourists towards culinary perception and preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Hypothesized Mean</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Tourists</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41.73</td>
<td>07.81</td>
<td>08.27</td>
<td>32.83</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source- Primary Data

Table 3 shows that sample mean of domestic tourists’ (N=400) responses and agreements levels are listed in above table which significant different from each other. The proposed mean is the value that is suggested or hypothesized as the average of a given population. It is usually based on prior knowledge or assumptions about the population, such as past data or theoretical expectations. The actual mean, on the other hand, is the true average value of a sample or population. It is calculated by summing up all the values
and dividing by the number of observations. The difference between the proposed mean and the actual mean can provide insight into the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis or assumptions. If the proposed mean is close to the actual mean, it suggests that the assumptions were reasonable and the data supports the hypothesis. If the proposed mean is significantly different from the actual mean, it may indicate that the initial assumptions were incorrect, and further investigation or analysis is required. Therefore, the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1.1 Domestic tourists have positive culinary perception before visiting the study area” got accepted and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” has been achieved.

Table 4 Level of agreement category of domestic tourists towards culinary perception and preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 4 and Graph 2, it is clear that domestic tourists have very high level of agreement towards culinary preference and perception while visiting the study area, as sample mean (41.73) fall under very high level of agreement category (41-50).

In order to measure responses and level of agreement of international tourists towards culinary perception and preferences while visiting the study area and to test the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1.2 international tourists have positive culinary perception before visiting the study area” and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” Culinary tourism refers to the travel experience that involves the exploration of food and drink culture in a particular region or country. The perception of culinary tourists towards a destination can be influenced by a variety of factors, including: Authenticity: Culinary tourists often seek authentic and unique food experiences that reflect the local culture and history. They may perceive a destination positively if they feel that the food and drink offerings are genuine and not overly commercialized. Diversity: Culinary tourists may be interested in exploring a range of different cuisines and local specialties. A destination that offers a diverse range of food and drink options may be perceived more positively. Quality: The quality of food and drink offerings can significantly impact a culinary tourist's perception of a destination. High-quality, fresh, and locally sourced ingredients, as well as skilled preparation and presentation, can contribute to a positive perception. Accessibility: Culinary tourists may prefer destinations that are easily accessible and offer a range of accommodation and transportation options to facilitate their food exploration. Price: The cost of food and drink offerings can also influence a culinary tourist's perception of a destination. They may perceive a destination negatively if the prices are too high or feel that they are not getting value for their money. Overall, the perception of culinary tourists towards a destination is influenced by the authenticity, diversity, quality, accessibility, and price of the food and drink offerings. A destination that is perceived positively by culinary tourists can benefit from increased tourism and economic benefits.

Table 5 Responses and agreement of international tourists towards culinary perception and preferences
Table 5 shows that sample mean of international tourists’ (N=100) responses and agreements levels are listed in above table which significant different from each other. The proposed mean is the value that is suggested or hypothesized as the average of a given population. It is usually based on prior knowledge or assumptions about the population, such as past data or theoretical expectations. The actual mean, on the other hand, is the true average value of a sample or population. It is calculated by summing up all the values and dividing by the number of observations. The difference between the proposed mean and the actual mean can provide insight into the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis or assumptions. If the proposed mean is close to the actual mean, it suggests that the assumptions were reasonable and the data supports the hypothesis. If the proposed mean is significantly different from the actual mean, it may indicate that the initial assumptions were incorrect, and further investigation or analysis is required. Therefore, the proposed alternative hypothesis “H1.2 international tourists have positive culinary perception before visiting the study area” got accepted and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” has been achieved.

Table 6. Level of agreement category of international tourists toward culinary perception and preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 6 and Graph 3, it is clear that international tourists have high level of agreement towards their culinary preferences while visiting the study area, as sample mean (16.75) fall under high level of agreement category (16-20).

For testing the proposed sub-alternative hypothesis H1.3 “There is no significant difference between agreement level of domestic and international tourists towards the culinary perception and preferences” and for achieving its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal”,

Table 7 Difference between domestic and international tourists towards culinary perception and preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Hypothesize Mean</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>52.18</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourists</td>
<td>Domestic Tourists</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>41.73</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>22.38</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Tourists</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**0.01 level of significance**

Table 7 depicts that the mean and S.D. for agreement level of Domestic and International tourists agreements levels are listed in above table which significant different from each other. The proposed mean is the value that is suggested or hypothesized as the average of a given population. It is usually based on prior knowledge or assumptions about the population, such as past data or theoretical expectations. The actual mean, on the other hand, is the true average value of a sample or population. It is calculated by summing up all the values and dividing by the number of observations. The difference between the proposed mean and the actual mean can provide insight into the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis or assumptions. If the proposed mean is close to the actual mean, it may indicate that the initial assumptions were correct, and further investigation or analysis is required. Hence, the proposed sub-null hypothesis proposed sub-alternative hypothesis H1.3 “There is no significant difference between agreements level of domestic and international tourists towards the culinary perception and preferences” has rejected and its corresponding objective “To assess the culinary preferences and perception of tourist arriving in West Bengal” has been achieved.

**Primary Data**

Figure 4 shows that domestic tourists have higher agreement as compare to International tourists towards culinary perception and preference in the study area.

**IV. Conclusion and Suggestions**

It was found that tourists have high level of agreement towards culinary perception and preferences, as sample mean (38.39) fall under high level of agreement category (31-40). It was noticed that domestic tourists have very high level of agreement towards culinary preference and perception while visiting the study area, as sample mean (41.73) fall under very high level of agreement category (41-50). Therefore it is concluded that domestic tourists have very high level of culinary preferences towards the study area. It was observed that international tourists have high level of agreement towards their culinary preferences while visiting the study area, as sample mean (16.75) fall under high level of agreement category (16-20). Therefore, it is concluded that international tourists have high level of culinary preferences towards the study area. It has been analyzed that domestic tourists have higher agreement as compare to International tourists towards culinary perception and preference in the study area. Therefore, it is concluded that both tourists have very high level of agreement towards impact of Culinary Tourism on Destination image.
REFERENCES: