

# Taste of India: Culinary Tourism and its Impact on Changing Food Culture.

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## Abstract

This research paper, titled "Culinary Tourism and the Changing Popular Culture of Food in India," embarks on a journey to explore the dynamic interplay between culinary tourism and the evolving food culture in India. Through a sociocultural perspective, it examines the multifaceted influences, trends, and implications of this relationship.

One of the central themes addressed is the role of culinary tourism in promoting regional Indian cuisines and safeguarding cultural identities. The paper delves into how culinary tourism acts as a catalyst for the revival and celebration of lesser-known regional dishes, offering a platform for their recognition on a global scale. Moreover, it assesses the profound impact of tourists' growing interest in local foods on the preservation of traditional cooking techniques and recipes.

In the midst of globalization, urbanization, and technological progress shaping Indian society, there is a concurrent transformation unfolding within the traditional culinary landscape. This research endeavours to examine how culinary tourism operates as a conduit between heritage and modernity, facilitating the safeguarding of cultural identities while accommodating the changing preferences of today. It delves into the strategies related to marketing and branding that are utilized to spotlight the distinctiveness of regional cuisines, providing a comprehensive perspective on the driving forces contributing to the surging popularity of these gastronomies.

The implications of this study transcend the boundaries of culinary tourism, offering valuable insights into the broader conversation surrounding cultural preservation, social cohesion, and the repercussions of globalization on indigenous customs. By meticulously dissecting the intricate relationship between culinary tourism and the ever-evolving food culture, this paper strives to illuminate the complex tapestry of meaning interwoven into the act of dining and its profound significance in the context of contemporary Indian society.

**KEYWORDS:** Culinary tourism, Culture of Food, Food Tours, Regional Indian Cuisines, Local Food, Cultural Identity.

## I. Introduction

Food tourism is focusing on food as an attraction of a destination (Shan & Shende, 2017, as cited in Sharaf Eldean, 2020). Culinary tourism, the practice of exploring destination's food culture, has gained global prominence in recent years. In the context of India, renowned for its diverse regional cuisines, understanding the relationship between culinary tourism and the evolving popular culture of food is of paramount importance.

This research topic holds significance because it unravels the intricate connection between culinary tourism and the changing food culture in India. It sheds light on how this evolving relationship impacts the preservation of cultural identities embedded in regional cuisines. As Indian cuisine adapts to contemporary tastes and the demands of a global audience, it becomes crucial to explore how this transformation influences cultural traditions and identities.

Moreover, the rise of culinary tourism offers a unique opportunity to safeguard and promote regional culinary traditions. It serves as a means of preserving cultural identities, as travellers seek authentic culinary experiences, thereby helping to sustain local food practices and traditions. Culinary tourism, through its immersive and experiential nature, can play a pivotal role in the preservation and celebration of the diverse food cultures that India has to offer.

Through ethnographic research, media analysis, and case studies, we aim to uncover how culinary tourism can contribute to cultural preservation and economic growth in India. This research illuminates the transformation of Indian cuisine in the global culinary landscape and its cultural significance.

## II. Overview of the Culinary Tourism Industry Worldwide:

Culinary tourism, the practice of exploring a destination's cuisine as a central part of the travel experience, has gained substantial popularity worldwide. This trend reflects the growing fascination with food as a cultural and experiential element of travel. Sharaf Elden (2020), further told that tourists may travel to some destinations just to experience food products of these destinations such as Napa Valley in California, Lyon in France, Tuscany in Italy, or Yarra Valley in Victoria at Australia. These regions have established an excellent reputation for their food products. Therefore, big numbers of tourists are visiting these places to experience their food products (Hall & Sharples, 2003, as cited in Sharaf Eldean, 2020). Food tourists seek not only to savour the flavours of a region but also to understand the culinary traditions, history, and people behind the dishes. Several key aspects characterize the culinary tourism industry globally:

1. **Diverse Destinations:** Culinary tourism is not limited to specific countries or regions. It spans the globe, with various destinations renowned for their culinary experiences. These destinations include cities like Tokyo for its sushi, Bangkok for street food, Italy for its pasta and wine, and Mexico for its rich flavours, to name just a few.



2. **Experiential Travel:** Culinary tourism emphasizes experiential travel, encompassing cooking classes, market tours, food festivals, and visits to local farms and wineries. Travelers actively engage with local food cultures, often participating in cooking and tasting sessions.
3. **Local and Authentic Experiences:** Food tourists often prioritize authentic and locally sourced food experiences. They seek out family-run restaurants, street

vendors, and traditional eateries to sample dishes that represent the region's heritage and flavours.

4. **Cultural Exploration:** Culinary tourism goes beyond the plate; it's an exploration of culture, history, and traditions. Dining customs, food rituals, and the stories behind dishes all contribute to the immersive experience.

### III. Culinary Tourism in India:

India, with its diverse and flavourful cuisine, has rapidly emerged as a culinary tourism hotspot. Indian culinary tourism offers a blend of rich traditional dishes, regional specialties, and contemporary adaptations. Culinary tourism in India has experienced significant growth in recent years, making it a vibrant and sought-after segment of the tourism industry. According to TripAdvisor, it is suggested that food tours are the most growing experience category in tourism activities as they increased by 61% in 2016-2017 (Kowalczyk, 2020, as cited in Sharaf Eldean, 2020). India's culinary diversity, deeply rooted in its rich history and culture, has made it an enticing destination for food enthusiasts from around the world. Here, we provide an overview of the culinary tourism industry in India, highlighting popular destinations and experiences that draw food tourists, as well as the factors contributing to its growth. Key aspects of the culinary tourism industry in India include:

1. **Regional Diversity:** India's culinary landscape is incredibly diverse, with distinct regional cuisines. Culinary tourists can explore the fiery curries of the South, the chaats of North India, the vegetarian delights of Gujarat, and the seafood feasts of the coastal regions.
2. **Street Food Culture:** Indian street food, from Kolkata's puchkas (panipuri) to Mumbai's vada pav, offers a dynamic, flavourful, and accessible introduction to Indian cuisine. It's a major draw for culinary tourists.
3. **Cooking Classes:** Cooking classes are a popular culinary tourism activity in India, allowing visitors to learn the art of Indian cooking and gain hands-on experience with local ingredients and spices.
4. **Food Festivals:** India hosts various food festivals, such as the Goa Food and Cultural Festival and the Pushkar Camel Fair. These events provide platforms for culinary tourists to explore the country's diverse culinary traditions.
5. **Culinary Tours:** Organized culinary tours and food walks are gaining popularity, allowing travellers to explore local markets, taste authentic dishes, and even participate in cooking classes to learn the art of Indian cooking.

### IV. Popular Culinary Tourism Destinations and Experiences

1. **Delhi:** The capital city of India offers a diverse culinary landscape, from street food markets like Chandni Chowk to fine dining experiences in upscale restaurants. Travelers can savour iconic dishes like chholebhature, butter chicken, kebabs, parathas and various chaats. These destinations include cities like Tokyo for its sushi, Bangkok for street food, Italy for its pasta and wine, and Mexico for its rich flavours, to name just a few.



2. **Mumbai:** Known as the "food capital" of India, Mumbai boasts a blend of local street food, coastal cuisine, and international flavours. Iconic dishes include vada pav, pav bhaji, and seafood specialties
3. **Jaipur:** The pink city of Jaipur is celebrated for its royal Rajasthani cuisine and exclusive Rajasthani Thalis, including dal baaticurma, gate kisabziand ghewar (a sweet dessert) etc.Visitors can dine in historic havelis for an authentic experience.
4. **Kolkata:** Kolkata offers a unique culinary journey with its famous sweets like rasgulla and sandesh, as well as street food delights like kathi rolls and puchka (panipuri).
5. **South India:** The southern regions of India, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, are known for their rich vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. Experiences include banana leaf meals, dosas, idlis,and seafood curries.



## V. Factors Contributing to the Growth of Culinary Tourism in India:

The burgeoning popularity of culinary tourism in India can be attributed to its multifaceted factors, encompassing a diverse and culturally rich culinary heritage, the cultural significance of cuisine, and the impactful influence of both media and government-led initiatives. Travelers are not only enticed by the prospect of savouring iconic Indian dishes but also by the immersive encounters that enable them to connect deeply with India's cultural tapestry through its food. The future of culinary tourism in India appears bright, with ongoing growth and innovative developments within the culinary tourism sector. Several factors contribute to the growth of culinary tourism in India:

1. **Rich and Diverse Culinary Heritage:** India's millennia-old culinary traditions and diversity, with distinct regional cuisines, a wide range of Flavors, spices, and cooking techniques, attract food enthusiasts seeking an authentic and diverse culinary experience.
2. **Increased Global Exposure:** Exposure to Indian cuisine through international restaurants, cookbooks, and television shows has piqued the interest of global travellers, driving them to explore India's culinary riches firsthand.
3. **Government Initiatives:** The Indian government has actively promoted culinary tourism through initiatives like "Incredible India" campaigns, encouraging both domestic and international travellers to explore the country's culinary heritage.
4. **Social Media and Food Blogging:** The rise of social media and food blogging has given visibility to India's vibrant food culture, encouraging culinary tourists to seek out unique and Instagram-worthy food experiences.
5. **Tourism Infrastructure:** Improved infrastructure, accommodation options, and transportation services make it easier for culinary tourists to travel across India and explore its diverse food scenes.

Culinary tourism has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting lesser-known regional Indian cuisines to a wider audience. It not only celebrates the rich diversity of Indian culinary traditions but also contributes to the preservation and recognition of regional dishes that might otherwise remain hidden gems. The global culinary tourism industry and its growth in India are driven by a combination of factors, including the allure of diverse

cuisines, the demand for authentic and experiential travel, and the influence of media and promotion efforts. India's rich culinary heritage and regional diversity, coupled with the global appeal of Indian cuisine, make it a prominent destination for food-loving travellers.

Here, we investigate how culinary tourism plays this pivotal role and discuss the marketing and branding strategies employed to showcase the uniqueness of regional dishes.

- 1. Promotion of Lesser-Known Regional Cuisines:** Lesser-known Regional Cuisines are promoted by the following measures- *Cultural Exchange:* Culinary tourism fosters cultural exchange between tourists and local communities. As travellers seek authentic experiences, they often venture beyond popular tourist destinations to explore lesser-known regions. This leads to the discovery of regional dishes that may not have gained widespread recognition. *Food Tours and Festivals :* According to global reports on gastronomic tourism, food events occupy the first place of the most important Gastronomic Tourism activities in the world (expressed by 79%), followed by Food Tours (62%), cooking workshops (62%), food fairs (59%), visits to markets and food producers (49%), museums (12%), and other related activities (20%) (UNTWO, 2012). Food tours and festivals dedicated to specific regional cuisines are instrumental in introducing travellers to local flavours. In India, there are several food festivals to promote India as a culinary tourism destination such as International Mango Festival, Kashmir Food Festival, Delhi Tourism's Dillike Pakwaan Festival, Gujarati Food Festival and Sea Food Festival of West Bengal (Banerjee, 2015). The Kumaoni cuisine festival in Uttarakhand or the Konkan food trail in Maharashtra provide opportunities to savour lesser-known dishes from these regions. *Cooking Classes:* Many culinary tourism experiences include cooking classes where tourists learn to prepare regional dishes. This hands-on approach not only promotes the cuisine but also empowers local communities by generating income from teaching traditional cooking methods. *Food Bloggers and Social Media:* Food bloggers and social media influencers often play a role in promoting regional cuisines by documenting their culinary journeys. Their posts and recommendations reach a global audience, generating interest in lesser-known dishes.
- 2. Marketing and Branding Strategies:** Culinary tourism plays a vital role in promoting regional Indian cuisines by providing exposure, fostering cultural exchange, and creating authentic experiences. Effective marketing and branding strategies capitalize on storytelling, local partnerships, curated itineraries, and digital media to showcase the uniqueness of regional dishes as follows:- *Storytelling:* Effective marketing of regional cuisines involves storytelling. Highlighting the history, cultural significance, and unique ingredients of a dish or cuisine can pique the interest of travellers. Narratives that connect the food to the local community, traditions, and geography add depth to the culinary experience. *Local Partnerships:* Collaboration with local farmers, markets, and food producers can enhance the authenticity and sustainability of regional cuisine promotion. Emphasizing the use of locally sourced ingredients can be a compelling marketing strategy. *Culinary Trails and Itineraries:* Designing culinary trails and itineraries that focus on specific regional cuisines is an effective way to guide travellers in exploring lesser-known culinary gems. These curated experiences offer a structured approach to discovering new flavours. *Culinary Events:* Organizing food festivals, cook-offs, and competitions that feature regional dishes can create buzz and attract food enthusiasts. These events provide a platform for chefs and

home cooks to showcase their skills and unique creations. *Digital Media:* Leveraging digital platforms, including websites, apps, and social media, is essential for reaching a global audience. Sharing visually appealing content, such as photos and videos of regional dishes, can evoke curiosity and interest. *Collaboration with Tourism Boards:* Collaboration between culinary tourism providers and regional tourism boards can lead to effective promotion. Joint efforts to create marketing campaigns, brochures, and online resources can highlight lesser-known cuisines. By celebrating these lesser-known culinary traditions, culinary tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage while delighting and educating travellers from around the world.

## VI. Preservation of Cultural Identities

Culinary tourism serves as a powerful vehicle for preserving cultural identities in diverse regions of India. By immersing travellers in local food traditions and involving communities in showcasing their culinary heritage, this form of tourism safeguards cultural identity. *Cultural Heritage Preservation:* Culinary tourism allows regions to celebrate their unique culinary traditions, which are often deeply intertwined with cultural practices. The process of sharing local dishes with visitors helps preserve these age-old culinary identities. *Community Involvement:* Local communities play a pivotal role in showcasing their culinary heritage. They actively participate in food-related tourism activities, such as conducting cooking classes, hosting food festivals, and serving traditional dishes, thereby sharing their culture with tourists. *Interactions and Exchange:* Interactions between travellers and local communities create opportunities for cultural exchange. Communities pass down culinary traditions and knowledge to visitors, ensuring that cultural identities are not only preserved but also shared and celebrated. *Economic Empowerment:* Culinary tourism can contribute to the economic empowerment of local communities. By monetizing their culinary skills and traditions, communities have a vested interest in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. In essence, culinary tourism in India acts as a dynamic platform where cultural identities are not only safeguarded but also revitalized through community involvement and cultural exchange.

## VII. Tourists' Interest in Local Foods and Traditional Cooking Techniques

Tourists in India exhibit significant interest in exploring and savouring authentic local foods during their culinary journeys. This interest plays a pivotal role in encouraging restaurants and eateries to uphold traditional cooking techniques and recipes. *Tourist Demand:* Travelers increasingly seek authentic and region-specific culinary experiences. They actively search for local eateries and street food stalls to taste traditional dishes, fostering a demand for authentic cuisine. *Menu Diversity:* To cater to tourists' preferences, many restaurants expand their menus to include regional specialties. This not only meets the demand for authenticity but also encourages chefs to preserve traditional recipes and cooking methods. *Culinary Tourism Promotion:* Culinary tourism initiatives and food-focused tours often revolve around authentic local food experiences. These programs contribute to the promotion of traditional cooking techniques and recipes by connecting tourists with local culinary traditions. In summary, tourists' interest in authentic local foods during their culinary journeys in India acts as a catalyst for restaurants and eateries to maintain and showcase traditional cooking techniques and recipes. This dynamic relationship helps preserve and celebrate the country's rich culinary heritage.

### VIII. Impact on Local Food Industries

Many destinations see food tourism as a way to generate more sustainable tourism benefits for local producers and businesses (Green & Dougherty, 2008, as cited in Moscardo, Minihan, & O'Leary, 2015). Culinary tourism can play a role in local development, create new tourism products, and stimulate innovation and support marketing and branding (Richards, 2012). The economic impact of culinary tourism on local food industries, farmers, and artisanal producers across different regions reveals a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. *Economic Boost*: Culinary tourism injects funds into local economies, benefiting farmers and artisans who provide ingredients and traditional products. *Challenges of Authenticity*: Meeting tourists' demands for authentic experiences while preserving the authenticity of traditional dishes can be challenging. Striking the right balance is crucial. *Opportunities for Growth*: Culinary tourism creates opportunities for culinary entrepreneurs, fostering the growth of local food industries and encouraging the continuation of traditional food practices. In essence, while culinary tourism offers economic benefits, maintaining authenticity remains a key challenge and opportunity for local food industries and artisans.

### IX. Culinary Tourism and Social Dynamics

Analysing interactions between tourists and local communities in culinary experiences reveals their significant role in fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. *Cultural Exchange*: These interactions allow travellers to immerse themselves in local traditions, including cooking techniques and rituals, leading to a deeper appreciation of the culture. *Mutual Understanding*: Such encounters promote mutual understanding by breaking down cultural barriers. Travelers gain insights into the daily lives of local communities, fostering empathy and respect. In essence, these interactions serve as bridges that connect tourists and local communities, enriching both parties through cultural exchange and fostering greater mutual understanding.

### X. Challenges and Opportunities

Regional Indian cuisines face several challenges when adapting to the demands of culinary tourism without compromising their traditional essence. However, there are also opportunities for sustainable growth that can preserve cultural integrity.

First, we will look at the *Challenges*: *Commercialization*: Balancing the need to cater to tourists' preferences with commercial pressures can lead to compromises in traditional recipes and authenticity. *Quality Control*: Ensuring consistent quality while catering to a larger tourist audience can be a challenge for small-scale local producers and restaurants. *Over-Tourism*: Excessive tourism can put pressure on local resources and traditions, leading to commodification and loss of cultural essence.

### XI. The Opportunities are:

*Culinary Education*: Promoting culinary education and training for local communities can enhance their skills and empower them to meet tourists' demands while preserving traditions. *Sustainable Sourcing*: Emphasizing sustainable sourcing practices and supporting local farmers and artisans can maintain the authenticity of ingredients. *Cultural Interpretation*: Encouraging locals to share the stories and cultural significance behind dishes can enhance the tourist experience while preserving traditions. *Community Involvement*: Involving local communities in culinary tourism initiatives and revenue-sharing models can ensure that they benefit economically while safeguarding their heritage. Therefore, the key lies in finding a delicate balance between meeting the demands of culinary tourism and preserving the cultural integrity of regional Indian cuisines. Sustainable growth can be achieved by promoting

education, sustainable sourcing, cultural interpretation, and inclusive community involvement.

## XII. Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

Sustainable and responsible practices in culinary tourism are vital for ensuring the long-term preservation of cultural heritage and food traditions in India. These practices prioritize the well-being of local communities, the environment, and cultural authenticity. Here's why they are crucial: *Preservation of Cultural Heritage*: Sustainable culinary tourism initiatives help preserve the cultural identity and culinary heritage of local communities by valuing and promoting traditional food practices. *Economic Empowerment*: Responsible practices support local economies by providing income opportunities for farmers, artisans, and small-scale food producers, contributing to the economic sustainability of the region. *Environmental Conservation*: Sustainability ensures that culinary tourism does not harm the environment through overexploitation of resources or pollution, preserving natural landscapes and ingredients. *Authentic Experiences*: Travelers seek authentic experiences, and responsible culinary tourism delivers just that. It offers tourists the opportunity to engage with local communities, learn about their traditions, and savour genuine regional flavours.

## XIII. Case Studies of Successful Initiatives in India:

1. **The Spice Route, Kerala**: Kerala's Spice Route initiative is a prime example of sustainable culinary tourism. It promotes the historical spice trade of the region, connecting travellers with local communities engaged in spice cultivation. This initiative preserves traditional farming practices while offering tourists an immersive cultural experience.
2. **Kutchi Dabeli Trail, Gujarat**: In Kutch, Gujarat, the "Dabeli Trail" offers travellers the chance to taste the region's iconic street food, dabeli. Local women entrepreneurs operate food stalls, sharing their culinary expertise with visitors. This initiative empowers women economically while preserving the authenticity of the dabeli recipe.
3. **Organic Farm Tours, Himachal Pradesh**: Himachal Pradesh offers organic farm tours that educate tourists about sustainable agricultural practices. These tours promote organic farming and biodiversity conservation while providing income to local farmers.
4. **Khadi and Village Industries, Maharashtra**: The Khadi and Village Industries Board in Maharashtra promotes rural artisanal products, including traditional foods. By supporting small-scale producers, this initiative contributes to the preservation of rural culinary traditions. These case studies demonstrate that responsible culinary tourism initiatives can successfully balance tourism development with cultural preservation in India. By involving local communities, promoting sustainable practices, and offering authentic experiences, these initiatives contribute to the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage and food traditions.

## XIV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on culinary tourism in India has revealed a profound relationship between food, regional identity, and traditional cooking techniques. Food plays a pivotal role in preserving and expressing regional identities and cultural heritage in India and thus is culturally significant. The impact of Tourism is also very important. Culinary tourism contributes significantly to the promotion of lesser-known regional cuisines, fostering

economic growth and cultural exchange. Balancing the demands of tourism with the preservation of traditional culinary practices poses challenges, but opportunities for sustainable growth exist.

## XV. Recommendations

Here are some recommendations for stakeholders in the tourism industry and policymakers:

*Promote Authenticity:* Encourage the use of authentic ingredients and cooking methods in culinary tourism experiences to preserve the traditional essence of regional cuisines.

*Community Involvement:* Involve local communities in culinary tourism initiatives, ensuring they benefit economically while safeguarding their heritage.

*Sustainability Practices:* Promote sustainable sourcing, environmental conservation, and responsible tourism practices to minimize negative impacts on local ecosystems.

*Cultural Education:* Offer educational programs that teach tourists about the cultural and historical significance of regional dishes, enhancing their understanding and appreciation.

*Marketing and Promotion:* Collaborate with local communities to market regional cuisines effectively, using storytelling and digital media to attract food enthusiasts. By implementing these recommendations, the tourism industry and policymakers can support the sustainable promotion of regional Indian cuisines, ensuring that the rich tapestry of culinary traditions continues to thrive and evolve while preserving cultural identity.

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