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THE IMPACT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM ATTRIBUTES ON HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY SUSTAINABILITY



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of gastronomic tourism attributes on the sustainability of the hospitality industry in Malaysia, drawing insights from local tourists, hospitality and tourism lecturers, and industry professionals. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research was conducted in two phases: a site survey and in-depth interviews. The first phase involved a quantitative survey of 983 respondents, selected using stratified random sampling from a population of 1,061 based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table. The objective was to assess awareness and perceptions of gastronomic tourism and its influence on the Malaysian hospitality sector. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including ANOVA, correlation, and regression, were applied to the survey data. The findings indicate moderate awareness among participants regarding gastronomic tourism ($M=3.78$) and the hospitality industry ($M=3.97$). ANOVA results revealed significant differences in perceptions based on age, education, income, and occupation. Correlation analysis identified local food content ($r = 0.43$) as the strongest predictor of hospitality sustainability, followed by cuisine type and cultural representation ($r = 0.31$), food and beverage attributes ($r = 0.22$), preparation methods ($r = 0.15$), preferences ($r = 0.14$), and availability ($r = 0.05$). The regression was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.42$, $F(5, 977) = 0.650$, $p < 0.05$) showed that authenticity, marketing, variety, and image of local food and beverages significantly contribute to hospitality industry sustainability. The second phase involved in-depth interviews with nine participants selected through snowball sampling, analyzed using thematic analysis. Qualitative findings highlighted the importance of positioning gastronomic tourism as a niche segment within Malaysia's tourism strategy to strengthen the industry's sustainability and global appeal. In conclusion, the study affirms that gastronomic tourism attributes plays a significant role in sustaining Malaysia's hospitality industry. It underscores the need for strategic recognition and development of this niche to position Malaysia as a leading gastronomic tourism destination.





KESAN ATRIBUT PELANCONGAN GASTRONOMI TERHADAP KELESTARIAN INDUSTRI HOSPITALITI

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti impak atribut pelancongan gastronomi terhadap kelestarian industri hospitaliti di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pelancong tempatan, pemsyarah hospitaliti dan pelancongan, serta penggiat industri. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran yang dijalankan dalam dua fasa: tinjauan lokasi dan temu bual mendalam. Fasa pertama melibatkan kaji selidik kuantitatif terhadap 983 responden yang dipilih secara pensampelan rawak berstrata daripada populasi seramai 1,061 orang berdasarkan jadual saiz sampel Krejcie dan Morgan. Tujuan kajian adalah untuk menilai tahap kesedaran dan persepsi terhadap pelancongan gastronomi serta kesannya terhadap sektor hospitaliti di Malaysia. Analisis statistik deskriptif dan inferensi seperti ANOVA, korelasi, dan regresi digunakan dalam analisis data. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa peserta mempunyai tahap kesedaran sederhana terhadap pelancongan gastronomi ($M=3.78$) dan industri hospitaliti ($M=3.97$). Hasil ANOVA menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan berdasarkan umur, tahap pendidikan, pendapatan dan pekerjaan. Analisis korelasi mengenal pasti kandungan makanan tempatan ($r = 0.43$) sebagai peramal paling kuat terhadap kelestarian industri hospitaliti, diikuti oleh jenis masakan dan representasi budaya ($r = 0.31$), atribut makanan dan minuman tempatan ($r = 0.22$), kaedah penyediaan ($r = 0.15$), pilihan makanan ($r = 0.14$), dan ketersediaan makanan tempatan ($r = 0.05$). Analisis regresi ($R^2 = 0.42$, $F(5, 977) = 0.650$, $p < 0.05$) menunjukkan bahawa keaslian, pemasaran, kepelbagaian, dan imej makanan dan minuman tempatan memberi kesan positif terhadap kelestarian industri hospitaliti. Fasa kedua melibatkan temu bual mendalam dengan sembilan peserta yang dipilih melalui teknik pensampelan rantaian salji, dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Dapatan kualitatif menekankan kepentingan meletakkan pelancongan gastronomi sebagai segmen khusus dalam strategi pelancongan Malaysia bagi mengukuhkan kelestarian dan daya saing industri di peringkat global. Kesimpulannya, pelancongan gastronomi memainkan peranan penting dalam menyokong kelestarian industri hospitaliti di Malaysia dan wajar diberi perhatian strategik untuk menjadikan Malaysia sebagai destinasi pelancongan gastronomi terkemuka dunia.



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LISTS OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

CUT	Cue Utilization Theory
MIDA	Malaysian Investment Development Authority
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia
MTPB	Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board
TARUMT	Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
UNWTO	The United Nations World Tourism Organization





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the study at hand. It begins by detailing the background of the study, establishing the context within which the research is situated. The problem statement addresses the critical issues the study aims to resolve, shedding light on gaps in knowledge or pressing concerns within the sector. In alignment with these challenges, the research aim and objectives articulate the study's primary purpose, guiding its direction and focus. Accompanying this, the research questions provide a structured framework to investigate specific areas of interest. To ensure scientific rigor, the study's null hypotheses are presented, setting measurable criteria for evaluation. Additionally, the conceptual framework offers a theoretical lens to interpret findings, linking the research variables meaningfully.

Key terminologies integral to the study are defined under operational definitions, ensuring clarity and consistency throughout the research process. These definitions encompass core concepts such as gastronomy, tourism attributes, and the





roles of industry players, enhancing the reader's understanding. Finally, the significance of the study highlights its broader implications.

1.2 Background of the Study

As one of the world's largest economic sectors, as stated by the World Travel and Tourism Council 2023, the hospitality and tourism industry is considered as one of the vital industries in the service sectors (World Travel & Tourism Council Report, 2023).

In 2019, the sector contributed 10.3% of global gross domestic product and supported 1 in 10 jobs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sector shrank by 50.4% in 2020, losing 62 million jobs. However, by 2021, the sector started to recover, contributed to the global economic growth from US\$ 4.8 trillion to US\$ 5.8 trillion, and provided work to 18.2 million employees (World Travel & Tourism Council Report, 2023).

Despite the impact of COVID-19, along with natural disasters and terrorist threats that have happened for the past decades, the industry's performance is still going strong, resilient, and recovering strongly (World Travel & Tourism Council Report, 2023).

Based on this report, it was assumed that there would be a continuation of demand in the hospitality and tourism sector in the future. Therefore, hospitality and tourism industry leaders should be well prepared to provide a high-quality service to the industry. Along with the development of the hospitality industry, the role of food is another important aspect that has boosted the industry. Wijaya (2019, p. 1) asserts that "food can be utilised as a strategic means to boost the country's tourism industry". Food not only acts as a medium to fulfilling human basic physiological needs, but it also becomes a motivation for people to travel (Indra, Juliana, Hubner & Sitorus, 2022; Bjork & Kauppinnen-Raisanen, 2017). As an indispensable part of travelling, food is





more than just being nourishment (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). Food helps in enhancing the experience of tourism, acts as a source of enjoyment and opportunities which creates fine memories for the tourists (Kesgin, Onal, Kazkondu & Uysal, 2022), and at the same time is an expressive form of art (Guzel & Apaydin, 2016). Nonetheless, it should also be noted that food can either be a primary motivator for some or secondary for others, as contended by Kim, Park and Lamb (2019).

Nevertheless, despite the rapid growth of hospitality and tourism sector in Malaysia (Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), 2019; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), 2018; Salleh, Hamid, Hashim & Omain, 2010), there is still a lack of contents and literature reviews related to the topic of gastronomic tourism and the relationship with Malaysian hospitality industry. The topic has been taken for granted by the tourism authorities as a potential tourism product that can attract the visitation of international tourists to this country, which may contribute to Malaysia's money-spinner. Hence, there is a need to recognise the relationship of gastronomic tourism to the development of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. In comparison to other countries such as Singapore, Australia, United Kingdom, or United States of America, Malaysia has not yet embarked on recognizing the contribution of gastronomic tourism as one of the main niche products for the hospitality industry. The inability to integrate this sector into the niche product program is a concern as the industry is booming and become the second highest contributor to Malaysian economy (Tourism Malaysia Corporate Site, 2018).

The stability of Malaysian economy has encouraged the mushrooming of many new hotels throughout the years. According to Talib, Ariff, Hasim and Hanafiah (2022),





Malaysian hospitality is growing rapidly, consistent with the tourism industry. For the past 20 years, the sector has been identified as a prime contributing sector to Malaysian economic achievement (Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2019). It should be highlighted here that gastronomic tourism is a niche tourism sector that emphasizes many components, including local heritage food products, food authenticity, consumer behaviour, business and marketing, food law and regulations, policy and planning, food sustainability and entrepreneurship. To date, gastronomic tourism product campaigns which focused on positioning the local products are widely offered by tour operators such as in New Zealand, Australia, Germany and United Kingdom as part of their weekend gastronomy packages particularly among food and wine lovers (Scarpato, 2002; Söderström, 2022). As for Malaysia, there is a lack of positioning of local gastronomic products being carried out or offered by the tour operators or among the hotels which focused specifically on enjoying Malaysian gastronomic food heritage.

As asserted by Som et al. (2020), from tasting the local and regional dishes, visiting various gastronomic facilities, meeting chefs and sightseeing places where food and beverage are produced gives new knowledge and experience about other cultures. It also has become one of the trip motives and it is more than just eating. This notion has shown that through the introduction and exposure of high-quality local food and beverage to the tourists, it will not only contribute to the sustainability of gastronomic tourism in the hospitality industry, but at the same time will nurture the tourist's interest to revisit the destination. Having said that and based on the discussion above, there is indeed a need to investigate the current growth and impact of gastronomic tourism towards Malaysian hospitality industry. In the last four decades, hospitality and tourism





have been commonly associated with travelling for pleasure (Kang, Hwang, Lee & Park, 2022), while some look at the industry as providing services related to leisure and recreation (Hurd, Barcelona & Zimmerman, 2023). However, food and beverage are considered one of the most important elements in the hospitality and tourism industry today, along with accommodation and other tourism sectors (Polat & Özdemir, 2021).

As a part of an integral component of a travel experience, the various types of food and beverages, as well as the food culture practices and food heritage will increase the experiences of the tourists and become an important element in promoting popular holiday destinations and influencing tourist's destination choices (Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). These types of tourism activities which produced different kinds of experiences as asserted by Dixit (2020), will continue to grow and in fact was considered as the most important elements for the tourists who are on their travelling mood (Ullah, Khan Saeed, Zada, Xin, Kang & Hu, 2022).

The term 'globalization' plays an important role in influencing many aspects of human activity, including food consumption, production as well as tourism (Stalmirska, 2023). While globalization has brought a profound transformation to gastronomic tourism (Rachao, Breda, Fernandes & Joukes, 2019), there is a concern that globalization can significantly affect local gastronomic identity and image and the outcomes may threaten destinations that utilize their local cuisine and gastronomic products as a sources of main tourist attraction (Ramli, Noor & Afrizal, 2022). On the other hand, it may also act as an impetus that opens new opportunities for reinvention of local gastronomic products and identities (Mak et al., 2012).





To withstand the impact of globalization and to prepare the hospitality industry for gastronomic tourism, hospitality and tourism providers need to undergo revolutionary changes to ensure the industry as well as the human capital are produced not for a product-based economy, but also for knowledge-based economy (El Archi & Benbba, 2024; Deb, Kuri & Nafi, 2024).

Hospitality can be defined as “offering food, beverage and lodging, or in other words, or offering the basic needs for the person away from home. Another alternative definition would be “A contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink” (Tahiri et al., 2021). As for this study, extrapolating from this definition, hospitality industry can be perceived as “commercial organizations that specialise in providing accommodation and/or, food, and/or drink, through a voluntary human exchange, which is contemporaneous in nature, and undertaken to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned” (Gursoy, Malodia & Dhir, 2022). Furthermore, the development of communication and interpersonal ‘soft’ skills and leadership should be encouraged among the future workforce according to the views of the hospitality industry (Tanković, Kapeš & Kraljić, 2021).

In another point of view, there was also a growing interest in gastronomic tourism, a subset of cultural tourism where the experience of participating in a different culture is central (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). According to the scholar, since the hospitality industry has a natural role in providing food and drink experiences, it is therefore appropriate for the industry to include a gastronomy component to give





tourists a greater understanding of the history and culture of food and beverages (Koufadakis & Manola, 2020). Gastronomy, which is related to the relationship between food and culture, the art of preparing or serving rich delicate or appetizing food, the cooking styles of certain regions, and the science of good eating, is one of the sectors most valued by tourists (Aizega, 2019). As a part of niche tourism products, gastronomic tourism is an emerging phenomenon that attracts tourists to travel to a specific destination (Mariani & Okumus, 2022). Gastronomy tourism forms an integral part of local life and is forged by the history, culture, economy, and society of a territory which enriches the visitor experience, establishing a direct connection to the region, its people, culture and heritage (Pololikashvili, 2019). The local gastronomic products are not just a cultural identification; the value is more than that where it can create its own tourism products (Gonda, Angler & Csoka, 2021; de la Torre, Rojas & Romero, 2016).



The term gastronomic tourism applies to tourists or visitors who plan the entire or partial trip to taste the local products or take part in any activities related to gastronomy as asserted by Gheorghe et al. (2014). According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019, p. 8), gastronomy tourism can be defined as:

“A type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and other related products and activities while travelling. Along with authentic, traditional, and /or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomy tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals, and attending cooking classes. Eno-tourism or wine tourism, as a sub-type of gastronomy tourism, refers to tourism whose purpose is visiting vineyards, wineries, tasting, consuming and/or purchasing wine, often at or near the source”. The





definition given by the World Tourism Organization shared similar characteristics with the definitions given by scholars including Santich (2003) and Wolf (2002) who notes that gastronomy have an important role in providing unique experiences to the visitors or tourists who visited a destination. On the other hand, Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez Canizares (2011) and Zelinsky (1985) suggested that motivation also plays an important role for the tourists to try the local cuisine while travelling to a destination Table 1.1 shows the key definitions of gastronomic tourism from different scholars throughout the years.

Table 1.1

Definitions of Gastronomic Tourism

Term	Author	Definitions
Gastronomic Tourism	Lopez-Guzman & Sanchez-Canizares (2011, p. 65)	The primary motivation of the tourist who travels specifically to experiment with the local cuisine, and as a secondary motivation when the tourist considers the local cuisine as an important, but not the only, option among other attractions available in the chosen destination.
	Zelinsky (1985, p. 52)	Eating at ethnic and regional cuisine restaurants; a person need not be a tourist in the conventional sense to take part in food tourism.
	Wolf (2002, p.5)	Travel in order to search for, and enjoy, prepared food and drinks which includes all unique and memorable gastronomic experiences.
	Santich (2003, p. 16)	The preparation and production of food and drinks, and also relates to how, where, when and why people eat. It is also associated with social, cultural, and historical aspects of food and eating, encompassing cuisine, restaurants, dining, food culture and tourism.





Term	Author	Definitions
	Lee, Packer & Scott (2015)	A journey in regions rich in gastronomic resources, who generate recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes, which include visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomical festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings or any activity related to food.
	Diaconescu & Nistoreanu (2013)	Gastronomic tourism is a niche travel who tries to achieve a perfect balance between useful and pleasant, between the daily needs of food and culinary experiences that can positively mark tourists. Consumption is an integral part of the tourist experiences, which are represented by visiting places, attendance to different traditions and customs, and eat local cuisine.
	Guruge (2020)	Gastronomic tourism consists of experiential trips that related to particular lifestyle and culture in which food as the core subjects, for instance; visit local farm, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, cooking show, demonstrations, and tasting session



According to Hjalager (2022), tourists cannot ignore food and beverages, and some consider them an important element when they travel. Tourists without doubt will encounter various types of food and beverages when visiting a country (Türker & Süzer, 2022), and all of these food related activities including the food culture and heritage can be looked at as part of gastronomy products (Som, Nordin & Ghazali, 2020; Jalis et al., 2009; Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Santich, 1996). Jalis et al. (2009) further contended that since a large proportion of tourist's experiences are spent on consuming food and drinks; therefore, the tourism marketers must develop a new way of attracting the tourists to visit the destinations. Hence, good food and eating campaigns without a doubt is an important element that will create a long lasting and memorable experience among tourists (Gupta & Mohta, 2022; Hjalager, 2022).





As a niche part of tourism activities, it can be assumed that gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry have a strong relationship between one another (Durkin Badurina, Klapan, & Soldic Frleta, 2022). Clearly, these have shown the utmost importance of the hospitality industry in providing tourists with knowledge and experiences of local gastronomic tourism. Based on these suggestions and the various facets of gastronomic tourism attention to the effect of gastronomic tourism attributes to the hospitality industry sustainability particularly from the perspectives of stakeholders in Malaysia is relevant and apparent in present-day research. Despite the proliferation of such studies, there is a limited analysis of the relationship between tourism, gastronomy, and the hospitality industry (Wan Muhd Zain, Azinuddin, Mior Sharifuddin & Ab. Ghani, 2023; Putra, 2021). In other words, the extent of the hospitality industry involvement with gastronomic tourism is still scarce. Additionally, the extent of the factors contributing to the sustainability of the hospitality industry in gastronomic tourism has not yet been widely researched. In the next section, further details of the challenges and problems of Malaysia's gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry were elaborated.

1.3 Statement of Problems

With the rising and rapid expansion of gastronomic tourism globally in the late 1970's (Okumus, Koseoglu & Ma, 2018), the impact of gastronomic tourism posed major challenges for the hospitality industry (Zahari, Jalis, Zulfify, Mohd Radzi, & Othman, 2009). Gastronomic tourism, which emphasizes the cultural experience of food and beverages, has emerged as a significant element within the hospitality industry, playing a crucial role in its sustainability (Kalenjuk Pivarski at al., 2024). However, the effect





of gastronomic tourism attributes on hospitality sustainability remains an underexplored area, particularly from the perspective of different socio-demographic groups such as age, gender, income level, and occupation (Jonson & Masa, 2023; Moral-Cuadra, Martin, Román & López-Guzmán, 2023). Understanding tourist preferences, such as local food contents, local food/cuisine types and culture representation, local food availability and local food preferences help to understand what attracts tourists and meets their expectations, enhancing their overall travel experience. Investigating local food and cuisine ensures that culinary traditions are documented, preserved, and promoted as part of the cultural heritage (Kalenjuk Pivarski at al., 2024).

The relationship between these socio-demographic factors and gastronomic tourism can provide valuable insights into how different groups engage with and contribute to the sustainability of the hospitality industry. Yet, there is a noticeable gap in empirical studies that address these relationships, especially in the context of Malaysia, a country known for its diverse culinary heritage (Hjalager, 2022).

The attributes of gastronomic tourism, including local food and beverage offerings, the content of local foods, types of local cuisines, and the cultural representation of these foods, are central to the attractiveness of a destination (Çavus, 2024; Seongseop, Munhyoung, Young & Youngjoon, 2021). These attributes not only serve as a means of cultural expression but also as a driver for sustainable tourism by promoting local economies and preserving culinary traditions. However, the extent to which these attributes contribute to the sustainability of the hospitality industry is not fully understood (Lin, Marine-Roig, LIncoln-Molina, 2021; Rinaldi, 2017). Local food





availability and preferences are particularly crucial, as they influence both tourists' experiences and the overall sustainability of the hospitality sector. The limited research on how these gastronomic attributes impact sustainability in the Malaysian context further exacerbates the issue.

Despite the potential of gastronomic tourism to enhance the sustainability of the hospitality industry, there are notable inadequacies and weaknesses in implementing gastronomic tourism campaigns targeting both local and international tourists (Gupta & Mohta, 2022). These shortcomings often stem from a lack of strategic planning and understanding of the socio-demographic factors influencing tourists' engagement with gastronomic experiences. For instance, campaigns may fail to address the diverse needs and preferences of different demographic groups, leading to ineffective promotion and a missed opportunity to capitalize on the full potential of gastronomic tourism (Kang et al., 2022). This problem is particularly pronounced in Malaysia, where the rich culinary diversity could be better leveraged to attract a broader audience (Hjalager, 2022).

Furthermore, there are also significant challenges in positioning local gastronomic products within the hospitality industry (Abd Aziz et al., 2021). These challenges include the difficulty in marketing local foods to international tourists, who may be unfamiliar with or hesitant to try unfamiliar cuisines (Selamat, Sulong, Shariff, Dolah & Diah, 2023), and the struggle to integrate local foods into the mainstream hospitality offerings. This issue is compounded by the lack of empirical research that identifies the specific factors influencing the success of local gastronomic products within the hospitality industry. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing





strategies that can effectively position local cuisines as a key component of sustainable tourism in Malaysia (Abd Aziz et al., 2021).

The hospitality industry in Malaysia, while vibrant and globally recognized, faces mounting challenges in aligning its sustainability efforts with the dynamic growth of gastronomic tourism (Janjua et al., 2023). Gastronomic tourism, which revolves around the exploration of local food and beverage culture, has emerged as a critical driver for the tourism sector. However, the relationship between gastronomic tourism attributes and the sustainability of the hospitality industry remains underexplored, particularly in the Malaysian context. This gap in understanding has created a disconnect between the issues addressed in this study's problem statement and its outlined objectives.



Liang, Abu Bakar, Che Ishak and Ab Karim (2024) underscores the importance of understanding tourists' motivations, the cultural experiences associated with local cuisine, and the role of social media in promoting gastronomic tourism. They also highlighted the significance of local culinary products in promoting cultural heritage and supporting sustainable tourism development.

The objectives of the study aim to address both demographic variables and sustainability, yet the integration of these elements with gastronomic tourism's unique attributes remains insufficiently defined. Demographic factors, such as age, income, and cultural background, undoubtedly influence tourists' food preferences and behaviors, but their connection to sustainability outcomes within the hospitality sector is unclear. This misalignment highlights the need for a more cohesive approach that





bridges demographic insights with sustainable practices (Thanasegaran & Chandrashekar, 2023).

Furthermore, this study hypothesized that gastronomic tourism attributes such as local food and beverage attributes, local food content, types of local cuisine, cultural representation, local food availability, and preferences are important in shaping tourists' experiences and influencing the sustainability of the hospitality industry. However, their potential impact on sustainable development, particularly in promoting eco-friendly practices, preserving cultural heritage, and supporting local economies, has not been adequately explored.

Another critical gaps that was found in the current literature is the lack of empirical studies that examine the gastronomic factors affecting the sustainability of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. While there is some research conducted on the general impact of tourism on local food heritage sustainability in Malaysia by Department of National Heritage (Jabatan Warisan Negara) and numerous scholars (Shahrin, Hussin & Shahrin, 2024; Kamaruzaman, Karim, Ishak & Arshad, 2022; Suaib, Ismail, Sadimon & Yunos, 2020; Ramli, Zahari, Suhaimi & Faat, 2015) specific studies focusing on the role of gastronomy are scarce. This gap in research makes it difficult for stakeholders, including policymakers, hospitality industry players, and local communities, to develop informed strategies that can enhance the sustainability of the industry through gastronomic tourism. Given the increasing importance of gastronomy in tourism, addressing this gap is essential for the future sustainability of Malaysia's hospitality industry.





In conclusion, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research that explores the relationship between socio-demographic factors and gastronomic tourism attributes in the context of hospitality sustainability in Malaysia. Such research should also address the inadequacies in current gastronomic tourism campaigns and the challenges in positioning local gastronomic products within the industry (Janjua, Krishnapillai & Rehman, 2023). This study aims to contribute to this growing field by providing empirical evidence that can guide future policies and practices in gastronomic tourism. In the next section, the research aims and objectives were outlined which become the guideline for this study.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives



The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of gastronomic tourism attributes on hospitality industry sustainability in Malaysia based on the perspectives of local tourists, hospitality and tourism lecturers and hospitality industry players. From this aim, five research objectives (ROs) are proposed:

- RO1. To identify the perception levels of gastronomic tourism in Malaysia based on demographic variables.
- RO2. To determine the preferences of the hospitality industry about gastronomic tourism based on demographic variables.
- RO3. To determine the correlation between gastronomic tourism attributes and hospitality industry sustainability.



RO4. To identify the gastronomic tourism attributes that affect sustainability in the hospitality industry.

RO5. To explore the influence of gastronomic tourism attributes on hospitality industry sustainability.

1.5 Research Questions

In supporting the research objectives and the direction of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1. What are the levels of perceptions of gastronomic tourism in Malaysia across different demographic groups?

RQ2. What are the preferences of the hospitality industry regarding gastronomic tourism based on demographic variables?

RQ3. What is the correlation between gastronomic tourism attributes and the sustainability of the hospitality industry?

RQ4. Which gastronomic tourism attributes significantly affect the sustainability of the hospitality industry?

RQ5. How do gastronomic tourism attributes influence the sustainability of the hospitality industry?



1.6 Operational Definitions

a Cue Utilization Theory

The Cue Utilization Theory (CUT) informs that consumers evaluate a product by utilising a series of cues or information related to the product (Brunswik, 1956; Cox, 1962). The product cues, which are classified into two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic cues, influence consumers' attitudes and interactions and impact purchase intentions (Cox, 1962; Kakaria, Simonetti & Bigne, 2023).

b Theory of Planned Behaviour

Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) explains and predicts human behaviour in a specific context, especially on the behaviour where people have incomplete volitional control (Ajzen, 1991).

c World Culture Theory

World culture theory views globalization as a way to make living together in one global system meaningful or even possible (Robertson, 1992). The theory shows a process in which the participants become aware of the changes happening in the environment under a 'hybrid' world culture (Robertson, 1992).





d Gastronomy

The essence of gastronomy is found in the knowledge, aesthetic, and experimental sensory expressions, as well as in the emotion, excitement, love, fun and theatre experienced, which gastronomes, gourmets, connoisseurs, practitioners, and food scholars develop while engaging with gastronomy. significant factor in destination branding, with food tourism emerging as amajor sector. In this viewpoint, gastronomy is tied to local economies, in which it was used as a platform in promoting regions through food festivals, restaurant tourism, and culinary experiences (Sandybayev, 2018; Lopez-Guzman, Uribe Lotero, Perez Galvez & Rios Ravera, 2017).

e Gastronomic Tourism



According to the World Tourism Organization (2019), gastronomic tourism can be defined as a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and other related products and activities while travelling. Guruge (2020) pointed out that gastronomic tourism consists of experiential trips that relate to a particular lifestyle and culture in which food as the core subject, for instance, visiting local farms, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, cooking shows, demonstrations, and tasting sessions. As for this study, the definition put forward by World Tourism Organization (2019) which defined gastronomic tourism as a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and other related products and activities while travelling involving authentic, traditional, and /or innovative culinary experiences was used.



f Gastronomic Tourism Attributes

From the viewpoint of culinary heritage, gastronomic tourism attributes can be referred to as the preservation and promotion of local ingredients and traditional recipes, often seen as a cultural resource. In this context, the importance of authentic food experiences is tied to local customs and historical practices, making it a vital attribute of gastronomic tourism (Basle & Lebe, 2023; Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). Another definition of gastronomic tourism attributes involves gastronomic satisfaction. Within this context, gastronomic tourism attributes can be described as the key factors influencing the tourist's loyalty to visit a tourism destination. These attributes, including food quality, food presentation, and cultural-relevance of the local dishes, reflect the overall enjoyment of the tourist while consuming local food (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). This present study situates its context of gastronomic tourism as attributed to the specific elements of a destination's culinary offerings that enhance its appeal to tourists, contributing to a unique food-centred travel experience. These attributes collectively shape the gastronomic tourism experience, contributing to the overall attractiveness and sustainability of the destination (Harman, 2023).

g Hospitality Industry

According to Brotherton and Wood (2000, p. 143), hospitality industry can be defined as commercial organizations that specialise in providing accommodation and/or, food, and/or drink through a voluntary human exchange, which is contemporaneous in nature and undertaken to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned". Davahli, Karwowski, Sonmez and Apostolopoulos (2020) characterise the hospitality industry



as encompassing the provision of services to guests in a manner that ensures their well-being, comfort, and satisfaction. It extends beyond basic service transactions, emphasizing emotional connections and hospitality experiences, which are integral to guest satisfaction and business success.

h Hospitality Industry Players

For this study, the hospitality industry players refer to any individuals of organizations which operates or involved with any three main components of the hospitality industry which includes food and beverage services, lodging services, and travel and tourism services (Gupta, Roy, & Sahu, 2022).



i Local Tourist

According to World Tourism Organization (2019), local tourists can be defined as a person who travels to a country other than that in which he/she has his/her usual residence but outside his/her usual environment for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose main purpose of visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the country visited, and who stay at least one night in a collective or private accommodation in the country visited.

j Hospitality and Tourism Lecturer

For this study, hospitality and tourism lecturer refers to an academic rank within universities, though the term varies for country to country. It generally denotes an





academic expert in the hospitality and tourism department who is hired to teach on a full or part-time basis (Gupta et al., 2022). They may also conduct research according to the job description of the institutions in which they are attached to.

1.7 Significance of the Study

As the purpose of this study was to determine the impact of gastronomic tourism on hospitality industry in Malaysia, the significance of the study can be segregated into two parts, firstly to the academic perspectives and secondly, to the hospitality, tourism and other related industry.

1.7.1 Academic Perspectives

From the academic and theoretical perspectives, there was a scarcity of research in this area, particularly investigating the relationship between the impacts of gastronomic tourism on the Malaysian hospitality industry. Therefore, the findings of this research contribute to the latest body of knowledge within the hospitality industry in the scope of gastronomic tourism. Furthermore, the study enriches the body of literature on gastronomy and tourism. As such, this study sought to identify the important components of gastronomic tourism to come up with strategies that are beneficial for both hospitality academicians as well as hospitality industry players.





1.7.2 Hospitality and Tourism, and other Related Industry

By acknowledging the contribution of this scope of industry to the country, it is hoped that the findings of this study could assist, in some way, the Malaysian Government and the Malaysian hospitality industry practitioners to develop a better understanding of the consumer/tourist food consumption in existing business as well as for destination marketing practice. The similarity in ethnic influences from the neighbouring countries, which has been quite successful in the gastronomic tourism business, presents a challenge for Malaysian cuisine and the country's tourism industry to become a gastronomic tourism destination. Therefore, this study acts as a platform in recognising the framework that might influence the consumer/tourist acceptance and choice of cuisine in comparison to other types of cuisine in a familiar environment.



Finally, the study opens the window for relevant sources which have the potential values to be used as a part of marketing practice. Clear and better marketing strategies are needed by the Malaysian Government to ensure the success of Malaysian cuisine compared to Singapore, which has similar culinary offerings. Since Malaysia has 14 different states, and 3 federal territories, it may offer a melange of food as well as cultural experiences which can distinguish the country from other competitors. This added with the minorities special cuisine should be added to the existing marketing strategy in marketing Malaysia as an exciting tourist destination.

1.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter one provides an overview of this research thesis. The chapter presents the background of the research, a discussion on the problem statement in context, research





aim, objectives and questions, the conceptual framework of the study, as well as the research hypotheses and limitations of the study. The aim of this study was to determine the effect of gastronomic tourism on hospitality industry sustainability in Malaysia based on three different perspectives: local tourists, hospitality and tourism lecturer, as well as hospitality industry players. It was discovered from the review of literature that there was a limited analysis on the relationship between gastronomy, tourism and hospitality industry. In other words, there was a scarce study discussing the relationship between gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry, and the factors that contributes to the sustainability of hospitality industry in relating to gastronomy. Five research objectives are proposed for this study. From these five research objectives, five research questions and 15 hypotheses was suggested to investigate the relationship between gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry. The theoretical framework of this study was adapted from Cue Utilization Theory by Cox (1962), and a few models in tourists' food consumption (Kim, Eves & Scarles, 2009; Mak, Lumbers, Eves & Chang, 2012). Additionally, this chapter also discussed on the significance of the study from the perspectives of academics and the hospitality and tourism related industries. The chapter concludes with operational definitions. The next chapter discussed the review of literature related to the concept, model and theories of gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry. The chapter also explore the past research related to the topic of gastronomic tourism and hospitality industry conducted in Malaysia and foreign countries.

