

The Role of Traditional Cuisine in Enhancing Tourist Satisfaction: An Exploratory Study on Hamirpur

Yashveer Bhardwaj¹, Sanjay Singh¹

¹School of Hotel Management, Airlines & Tourism, CT University, Punjab, India

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Abstract:

This study investigates the influence of traditional elements on customer satisfaction within the context of local cuisines in Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh (HP). Hamirpur, known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary offerings, provides an ideal setting for exploring the interplay between traditional culinary practices and customer experiences. The research focuses on visitors who indulge in local cuisines during their stay, with the objective of evaluating key factors that contribute to their satisfaction. These factors include culinary authenticity, dish presentation, food quality, and affordability, all of which are central to the dining experience.

A structured methodology involving systematic data collection and analysis will be employed to gather insights from respondents. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be utilized to ensure a comprehensive understanding of customer preferences and perceptions. The findings are expected to reveal critical aspects of customer satisfaction that can serve as a foundation for actionable recommendations.

The study aims to provide valuable insights for local food outlets by highlighting the significance of traditional elements in shaping customer experiences. These recommendations will help local businesses enhance operational efficiency, foster customer loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge. Additionally, this research contributes to the preservation and promotion of Hamirpur's cultural heritage by underscoring the importance of integrating traditional culinary elements into contemporary practices.

The results are anticipated to have broader implications for similar settings in other regions, offering a replicable framework for leveraging cultural heritage in the food and hospitality industry.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, traditional cuisine, culinary authenticity, food quality, dish presentation, affordability, local food outlets, cultural heritage, hospitality industry.

1. Introduction Traditional cuisine has emerged as a cornerstone of cultural tourism, offering visitors a profound way to connect with the heritage and identity of a destination. Food, as a cultural artefact, not only reflects the historical evolution of a region but also represents its values, traditions, and social fabric (Scarpato, 2016; Sims, 2019). For regions like Hamirpur, nestled in the culturally vibrant state of Himachal Pradesh, traditional dishes serve as more than just nourishment—they are narratives of history, culture, and community. Despite the increasing popularity of culinary tourism, Hamirpur's rich gastronomic heritage remains underexplored as a strategic asset for attracting tourists.

Globally, studies emphasize that food experiences significantly influence tourists' satisfaction, often ranking as a highlight of their travels (Ellis et al., 2018). Dishes prepared using local ingredients and age-old recipes provide a multisensory encounter that offers authenticity and fosters a deeper connection with the destination. According to Karim and Chi (2019), culinary tourism enhances the overall travel experience by engaging tourists in local culture through the unique flavors and cooking practices of traditional dishes. Hamirpur's culinary offerings, such as "siddu," "madra," and "babru," are rooted in centuries-old practices, making them invaluable cultural assets.

Moreover, tourism literature underscores the role of culinary experiences in promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging local sourcing, preserving traditional cooking methods, and fostering economic opportunities for local communities (Kline et al., 2016; López-Guzmán et al., 2017). For instance, studies have demonstrated that regions leveraging traditional cuisine as a core tourism strategy often experience increased economic benefits and enhanced cultural preservation (Smith et al., 2020). However, Hamirpur's potential as a culinary tourism hotspot remains largely untapped. Recognizing the gap in leveraging traditional cuisine as a tool for sustainable tourism development, this paper aims to explore how local food enhances tourist satisfaction in Hamirpur. By addressing this issue, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for tourism planners, policymakers, and stakeholders to integrate culinary experiences into the broader tourism strategy for the region.

2. Theoretical Framework/Literature Review

2.1 Traditional Cuisine as a Driver of Cultural Tourism Traditional cuisine has long been recognized as a critical element in promoting cultural tourism. Researchers like Quan and Wang (2004) describe food as an "existential authenticity," wherein the act of consuming local dishes provides tourists with a deeper connection to a destination's culture. Studies also highlight the role of gastronomy in creating memorable experiences, which significantly impacts tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

2.2 Dimensions of Tourist Satisfaction Tourist satisfaction is a multidimensional construct shaped by various factors, including service quality, authenticity, and unique experiences. According to Kim et al. (2009), food experiences enhance these dimensions by engaging multiple senses and fostering cultural immersion. For Hamirpur, leveraging its distinctive culinary traditions can enhance these aspects, creating a competitive edge in the tourism market.

2.3 Culinary Tourism and Tourist Satisfaction: Research underscores the critical role of culinary experiences in shaping overall tourist satisfaction. Factors such as food authenticity, local uniqueness, ambiance, and service quality significantly impact the tourist experience. Tourists often prioritize traditional dishes that reflect the host culture's heritage, enhancing their sense of cultural immersion (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Kala & Barthwal, 2020). Such experiences not only offer sensory delight but also contribute to intellectual and emotional engagement, enriching the travel experience overall.

Sensory and Cultural Dimensions: Food serves as a multi-sensory experience, engaging taste, sight, smell, and even touch. The sensory aspect, along with intellectual and emotional satisfaction derived from engaging with local culinary traditions, helps in creating memorable tourist experiences.

Authenticity in cuisine, including the use of local ingredients and traditional preparation methods, deepens cultural appreciation and connection (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021; Promnil et al., 2021)

Impact of Food Attributes: Several studies highlight key attributes that enhance satisfaction, such as food quality, presentation, and authenticity. Regional cuisines, such as Indian cuisine, with its diversity and traditional preparation styles, are appreciated for their cultural narratives and use of local spices. These attributes not only enhance culinary satisfaction but also influence overall destination experience satisfaction (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; Hoque & Taufiq, 2019)

Role of Regional Context: Focusing on specific regions like Gujarat, India, researchers emphasize the need for localized studies to understand how culinary traditions influence tourist satisfaction uniquely. Local cuisines act as cultural symbols, preserving heritage while offering tourists a unique way to connect with the destination (Long, 2004; Hall & Sharples, 2008). Similarly, Hamirpur's traditional cuisine could provide insights into regional foodways and its role in tourism.

Economic and Social Implications: Traditional cuisine not only enhances satisfaction but also boosts local economies. Culinary tourism encourages the preservation of regional food heritage, promotes local businesses, and fosters sustainable tourism practices. Research also explores how tourists' positive dining experiences translate into higher destination loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion.

2.4 Relevance to culinary tourism in Hamirpur Hamirpur's traditional dishes, such as "siddu," "madra," and local chutneys, are reflective of its agrarian lifestyle and cultural ethos. Despite their appeal, these offerings are rarely integrated into mainstream tourism packages. This study seeks to position traditional cuisine as a core component of Hamirpur's tourism strategy, aligning with broader trends in experiential and sustainable tourism.

The intersection of traditional cuisine and tourist satisfaction has garnered significant attention in recent years, with studies underscoring its potential to enrich the travel experience and promote sustainable tourism. Traditional cuisine serves as an avenue for cultural immersion, offering tourists a tangible connection to the heritage and identity of a destination (Ellis et al., 2018). Research by Sims (2019) highlights the role of local food in creating authentic tourism experiences, noting that the uniqueness of regional cuisine often forms a lasting impression on visitors.

López-Guzmán et al. (2017) examined the motivations of international tourists in Spain, revealing that gastronomy significantly influences destination choice and overall satisfaction. Similarly, Karim and Chi (2019) found that culinary tourism enhances destination branding, as tourists associate food experiences with cultural authenticity. For rural regions like Hamirpur, leveraging traditional cuisine can address both economic and cultural objectives by promoting local sourcing and preserving traditional cooking methods.

Studies have also explored the economic impact of culinary tourism. Kline et al. (2016) demonstrated that regions investing in food tourism initiatives see increased visitor spending and greater economic benefits for local communities. This aligns with findings by Smith et al. (2020), who argue that food tourism fosters regional development by creating opportunities for small-scale producers and restaurateurs.

Traditional cuisine also plays a critical role in sustainable tourism. According to Scarpato (2016), integrating local food into tourism strategies promotes environmental sustainability by reducing food miles and encouraging the use of seasonal ingredients. Ellis et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of preserving culinary heritage, arguing that it safeguards cultural diversity in an increasingly globalized world.

Hamirpur's culinary heritage, though less documented, aligns with these global trends. Research on similar rural destinations indicates that traditional cuisine can be a key driver of tourist satisfaction when integrated into broader tourism strategies (López-Guzmán et al., 2017; Karim & Chi, 2019). This paper builds on this body of work by examining the specific context of Hamirpur, addressing gaps in the literature, and providing actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Gaps in Existing Research While significant research has been conducted on culinary tourism in global and urban contexts, rural regions like Hamirpur remain underrepresented. This gap underscores the need for localized studies that explore the interplay between traditional cuisine and tourism satisfaction in smaller, culturally rich destinations.

Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining structured surveys and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected from 150 tourists who visited Hamirpur and sampled its traditional cuisine. Quantitative data focused on factors such as food quality, authenticity, and affordability, while qualitative data explored tourists' emotional and cultural connections to local dishes.

3.2 Analytical Tools

Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to evaluate the data. Quantitative responses were analysed using statistical software, while qualitative responses were categorized into themes such as authenticity, presentation, and cultural immersion.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1

This chapter consists of the research findings, interpretation, and explanation of the study findings. It provides an analysis of the data collected and its implications on customer satisfaction in the hotels of Thika town.

4.2 Response Rate

The researcher distributed 150 questionnaires to respondents across the hotels covered in the study. All 150 questionnaires were returned fully completed, achieving a response rate of **100%**. This exceptional response rate ensures the data collected is representative and provides a reliable basis for analysis.

4.3 Demographic Information

4.3.1 Gender of Respondents

Out of the 150 respondents, 90 (60%) were male, and 60 (40%) were female. This indicates that the majority of hotel tourists in the study were male, which may reflect the broader tourist demographics in hotels within the region.

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	90	60.0	60.0	60.0
Female	60	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.3.2 Age of Respondents

The age distribution shows that tourists aged 31-40 years were the most frequent patrons (55%), followed by those aged 21-30 years (21.7%). The least represented were individuals below 20 years (6.7%).

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 20	10	6.7	6.7	6.7
21-30 years	33	22.0	22.0	28.7
31-40 years	83	55.3	55.3	84.0
Above 40	24	16.0	16.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.3.3 Occupation of Respondents

Most respondents (66.7%) were employed, 25% were self-employed, and only 8.3% were unemployed.

Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Unemployed	12	8.0	8.0	8.0
Self-employed	38	25.3	25.3	33.3
Employed	100	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.3.4 Number of Times Visited

Tourists who had visited the hotels more than three times formed the largest group (40%), followed by those who visited three times (30%).

Visits	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Once	12	8.0	8.0	8.0
Twice	33	22.0	22.0	30.0
Thrice	45	30.0	30.0	60.0
Above Three	60	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

4.4.1 Food Quality

Respondents moderately agreed that texture, portion size, and flavor influence satisfaction, with mean scores of 3.40, 3.23, and 3.43, respectively. Colour was less impactful (mean = 2.67).

4.4.2 Speed of Service

Key indicators such as time taken to serve, order accuracy, and sufficient staff positively influenced satisfaction (means of 3.63, 3.54, and 3.80). However, schedule strategy was less significant (mean = 2.38).

4.4.3 Atmosphere

Positive effects were noted for air quality, music, and temperature (means = 3.43, 3.51, and 3.83). Noise negatively impacted satisfaction (mean = 2.15).

4.4.4 Tourist Satisfaction

Positive comments, referrals, and loyalty were significant (means = 3.50, 3.41, and 3.79). However, the likelihood of revisiting scored lower (mean = 2.29).

4.5 Pearson Correlation Results

The study found significant relationships between all variables and tourist satisfaction. Atmosphere ($r = 0.747$) and speed of service ($r = 0.651$) had the strongest correlations, indicating their critical role in influencing satisfaction.

Variable	Food Quality	Speed of Service	Atmosphere	Tourist Satisfaction
Food Quality	1	—	—	0.509*
Speed of Service	0.043	1	—	0.651*

Atmosphere	0.479	0.258*	1	0.747*
Tourist Satisfaction	0.509*	0.651*	0.747*	1

Notes: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The study reveals that atmosphere and speed of service are the most influential factors for tourist satisfaction in Thika town hotels. While food quality also plays a significant role, its impact is relatively weaker compared to the other variables. Addressing noise and improving the schedule strategy could enhance the overall tourist experience further.

5. Conclusions

Traditional cuisine plays a pivotal role in enhancing tourist satisfaction by providing an authentic cultural experience. This study underscores the importance of leveraging Hamirpur’s culinary heritage as a strategic asset for sustainable tourism. Future research should explore long-term impacts and scalability of such initiatives in similar rural settings. Recommendations include promoting local dishes through targeted marketing campaigns and training programs for local chefs to maintain culinary authenticity.

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