



## **THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL FOOD IN TOURISTS POSITIVE EXPERIENCE AND DESTINATION IMAGE; A STUDY OF ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE.**

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### **Abstract**

*Every tourist site has traditional foods associated with it that reflect the cultural identity and legacy of that location. The accessibility of local cuisine offers tourists and local consumers enjoyable and memorable experiences. Tourism destinations compete with one another to promote food tourism, an expanding sector of the economy. Local foods is vital in rural areas for fostering a sense of place, fostering a variety of visitor experiences, and contributing financially to the well-being of the local community. Rural destinations will become more competitive by using local foods to strengthen its sustainability. The study aims to investigate the role of traditional foods in tourists' satisfaction experience and its effect on the destination image. A structured questionnaire for a field study was developed and self-administered to 60 tourists diners in restaurants that include local food in their cuisine who are within Abeokuta tourist sites (such as hotels, recreational park, tourist centers and historical sites). The results obtained confirm that there is a positive impact of traditional food on tourists experience and this has a positive effect on the destination image, as well as tourists' plans to return to the place in question. According to the results of the analysis, the study recommended theoretical implications to tourism administrators to adopt new approaches to attract tourists to destinations, based on influencing their after-experience contentment with local cuisine.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional foods, Tourist behavior, Tourist destination, Tourists satisfaction, Cultural*

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### **Introduction**

The tourist industry places a high value on food since it is one of the characteristics of a destination that can be utilized to market tourism. Food frequently reflects experience, regional culture, and its evolution. Culture cannot exist without the local cuisine. Experiencing a society's cuisine is one method to learn about it. Special foods that are exclusively available in a particular area may be marketed as high-quality tourist goods and services, which would benefit the host community and regional food-based Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Some cuisines have national brands and have the ability to draw tourists.

Food tourism involves activities that provide possibilities for eating and drinking while appreciating the local environment, history, and culture. Due to its inclusion of characteristics of culture, local production, and lifestyle, food may enhance a destination's reputation Tsai *et al* (2017). According to Chris *et al* (2008), food tourism also helps the destination's financial situation and advertising.

The phenomenon of food tourism has gained significant traction in recent years. Culinary tours, cooking classes, and food-focused festivals have become popular activities for tourists seeking to explore traditional food in-depth. These experiences provide an opportunity to not only taste traditional dishes but also to understand their cultural context and learn how to prepare them. Food tourism promotes cross-cultural understanding, appreciation, and respect for local traditions, as well as creating economic opportunities for the communities involved

Every trip package always takes into account the local cuisine. There is a strong connection between eating out and traveling. When you are in a certain location, the cuisine has particular qualities; Abeokuta has a wide variety of foods, which is crucial for local tourism. One of the various methods to assist tourists in exploring tourist locations is through food fair tours, which enable them to learn something particular while visiting culinary places.

### **Traditional food and tourism**

Being distinctive and memorable is of the highest importance in today's competitive world, and tasty traditional cuisine may be a valuable ally in accomplishing that aim. Traditional foods are ones that have been passed down through families or that have been enjoyed for a long time. These are traditional meals and dishes that may have historical precedents in national dishes, regional cuisines, or local cuisines. Some traditional foods have geographical



indicators and unique specialties that indicates they come from a protected region of origin, according to Milos *et al* (2021). These factors support prosperity and preserve a vibrant cultural legacy with regional cuisine.

Traditional cuisine and gastronomy might be a great tourist attraction. One of the aspects of hospitality that the travel and tourist business has produced is food. In their study, Besiere *et al* (1998) argued that because local cuisine may be both entertaining and culturally enriching, eating it may be a vital aspect of the vacation experience. One of the major factors in the growth of a tourism business is the creation of good traditional dishes, which may be a very favorable experience for any traveler. However, if a visitor's expectations are not satisfied when eating local cuisine, the visitor's viewpoint may have a detrimental impact on local tourism Ghanem (2019), Lopez-Guzman *et al* (2012).

Local cuisine is associated with visitor adventure because the concept of unique food makes it simple for tour operators to package a country, its varied culture, and its distinctive history as an appealing tourist destination. There are several factors that determines tourists acceptance of local foods, which are primarily their culture, personality, preferences and nationality. Nevertheless, tourists find it easier to accept differences in foods that are not crucial in their daily diet. Therefore, food serves as a valuable sensory experience, an energy booster, and a point of connection with local culture, hence it is and should be included in the complete travel package.

Traditional food is part of the important factors that influence the development of the tourism sector and it contributes significantly to tourists' positive experience. It is continuously use as an attraction to tourists' destinations. Hence, host communities need to take advantage of it to create awareness to their local community. Packaging traditional food as a tourist attraction to a host community will appeal to numerous tourists thereby improving local income and subsequent growth. However, many host communities are still in the process to recognize this, as few communities are taking advantage of it. To make a traditional food distinct, locally sourced and quality ingredients should be used and hygiene environment given a priority. This study intends to access the role of traditional food in tourists positive experience and destination image.

### **Significance of the study**

The research is focused on investigating the role of traditional food in tourists' positive experience and destination image. The researchers believe that the result may help in packaging the host community as tourist attractions. The result may help determine if local cuisines contribute to tourists' choice of destination and repeat visits to the said destination. This study will be use as a bridge to another research in the area.

### **Aims and objectives**

- To determine the impact of traditional food on tourist satisfaction experience
- To access the role of traditional food in promoting tourist destination
- To explore their interest in local food during Travelling

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>1</sub>: Good memorable traditional food impacts positively on tourist's satisfaction experience

H<sub>2</sub>: Good memorable traditional food experience in hosting destination gives a positive post-experience image brand to a destination

H<sub>3</sub>: Good memorable local food experience in hosting destination plays a role in tourists repeat visit

### **Literature review**

The societal upheavals of the 20th century have fueled an increase in interest in cuisine and travel. This, according to Sangkyun *et al.* (2020), is a result of cooking and food consumption taking center stage in visitors' experiences and leisure activities. This is thought to relate to the host community's way of life and sense of social identity. Visitors have the chance to learn about a place's culture and history through its traditional cuisine. Local cuisine, according to Csurgó *et al.* (2019), is the best indicator of the destination's intangible history.

In their study, Zainal *et al.* (2014) found that "climate, accommodations, and captivating scenery" were not deemed to be as significant as food, which is a necessary component of tourist products. In terms of social, environmental, cultural, historical, and economic factors, local foods are excellent ambassadors for the area. Through its tastes and flavors, food has a significant impact on how tourists are able to learn about the local traditions Ali *et al* (2016).



### ***Role of traditional food to local culture and heritage***

Local culture and traditions are shaped and preserved in large part by traditional food. It represents the cultural traditions, local foods, cooking techniques, and eating traditions of a community while also reflecting its historical, social, and environmental characteristics. Preservation of culinary tradition is one major role traditional food plays, as it serves as a cultural representative of a community by preserving its culinary customs. Cooking methods and recipe passed from a generation to another provide a connection to the past, which enhance cultural identity Pamela G. *et al* (2017). Traditional food uses locally sourced ingredients, showing the biodiversity and farming practices of a particular region Sarah *et al* (2002). The relationship between food and environment is significantly represented when local herbs, spices and animals are used in local cookery. Pascale B. (2008) in his study highlights that the sharing together of local food improves social connection within a community and promotes a feeling of identity. Annual festivals, community gatherings and family feasts centered on local foods provides opportunities for inter-generational transfer of knowledge and cultural exchange. These group activities strengthen cultural values and heritage. Local economies also benefit from traditional food through culinary tourism. Culinary tradition attract tourists who seek genuine food experiences that has led to the growth of SMEs related to food. This economic boost supports local farmers who produce traditional foods, conserving their methods and sustainable local development Sally E. *et al* (2010).

### ***Traditional food as a tool to promote tourist destinations***

Traditional food plays a major role in promoting tourist destinations. Using age-old recipes and cooking method for traditional food, contribute to the authenticity of a destination as travelers' desire to seek genuine experience increases; this provides a platform for traditional food to emerge as a tool to promote tourist destinations Rebecca S. (2009). Traditional food reflects the uniqueness of culture and heritage of a region, its ability to connect people make it a significant attraction for travelers. Mitchell *et al* (2001) in their study highlighted that traditional food provides opportunity for tourist to fully experience a host destination's culture and learn about its traditions, customs, and way of life. Traditional food is valued as a key tourist resource by many destination managers Alzbeta *et al* (2021); Ozdemir *et al* (2017) and a crucial component of the destination brand. Food is vital in promoting local goods Okomus *et al* (2018) and has the potency of attracting tourists to a destination if promoted on the appropriate social media channels Viljoen *et al* (2017).

### ***Food tourism and local food experiences***

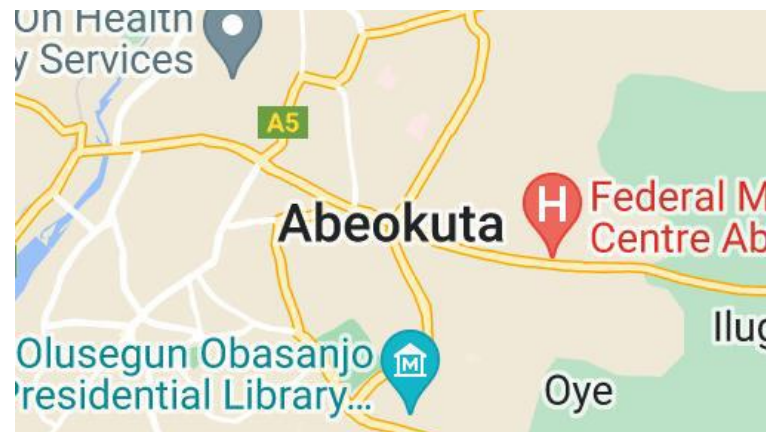
The broad definition of food tourism is the engagement of tourists in food-related activities while they are on vacation, such as purchasing local items and feasting on local cuisine Tommy *et al*. Tommy *et al* (2017). One may be traveling for this primary or secondary cause. Modern tourists usually look for experiences that entail fine dining, unusual meals, and food-related cultural traditions Ching-Shu *et al* (2012). By offering a wide range of opportunities to develop food and beverage-related stories about important facets of a local culture, such as its history and local attractions, food tourism varies from regular food intake Richard *et al* (2013). Travelers frequently have genuine experiences through culinary tourism Timothy *et al*, (2015). Contrary to conventional tourism, food tourism includes travelers engaging in flavorful and distinctive cultural experiences Chiung *et al*, (2018).

Local, authentic, and unique dishes that reflect the region's culinary culture are commonly emphasized in tourist eating experiences Björk *et al* (2016). Local cuisine plays a significant role in the tourism experience and contributes to the cultural legacy of the tourist destinations Berbel-Pinedaa, *et al*, (2019). Local cuisine improves tourism experiences by introducing tourists to a place via genuine cuisine that represents that place's culture. Chang (2014).

## METHODOLOGY



### Study Area



Abeokuta is the state capital of Ogun State in southwest Nigeria. It is surrounded by a cluster of rocky outcroppings that rise above the nearby woodland savanna on the east side of the Ogun River. It is 48 miles (78 km) south of Lagos on the major railway line from that city, as well as on the historic trunk road from Lagos to Ibadan, with links to Ilaro, Shagamu, Iseyin, and Kétou (Benin).

Abeokuta is a hub for agricultural commerce in modern times and a hub for the export of kola nuts, fruits, and palm products. The missionaries brought rice and cotton in the 1850s, and now the town's major skills include cotton weaving and dyeing. The federal Ogun-Oshun River Basin Development Authority has its headquarters in Abeokuta, and with plans to harness land and water resources in Lagos, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo states for rural development. Although local industry is still small, it currently includes sawmills, a plastics factory, and fruit canning facilities. The Aro granite quarries, which supply building materials to most of southern Nigeria, are close to the town, as well as the sizable, cutting-edge Ewekoro cement factory. Festivity tells the story of food better in this part of the world. Eforiro (a sort of vegetable soup), ewedu, and gbegiri, besides ekuru and aro, other well-liked foods include stews, maize, cassava, and flours. Abeokuta people are vast in cuisine.

### Research Approach

The research was carried in tourists centres in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria where the main focus is on understanding the role of traditional food in tourists positive experience and destination image. Inductive approach was adopted where the research focuses on traditional food from point view of tourists at various tourist centres at Abeokuta.

### Data Collection

Randomly distributed structured questionnaires are part of the data gathering tool utilized in this investigation to tourists diners in restaurants that base their cuisine on local food who are within Abeokuta tourist sites (such as hotels, recreational park, tourist centers and historical sites), Ogun state. The questionnaire consists of four sections: (a) demographic data of the respondents (b) tourists experience in relation with destination local food (c) interest in repeat visits to same destination in relation to traditional food during travelling (d) Behavioural intention towards the destination local food experience.

The study therefore covered two (2) tourist center and one (1) hotel in Abeokuta, Ogun states in the South Western region of Nigeria. Additionally, the information included in this article came from two separate sources; both primary and secondary sources. A well designed questionnaire was used to collect the primary data.



And the secondary data were obtained from publications and documented sources examples such as annual reports, brochures, textbooks, journals, press reports, articles and internet sources. Closed-ended questions questionnaire was adopted to restrict unnecessary responses.

## Result

Table 1: Demographic data of the respondents

Total= 60

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	21	35.0	35.0
Female	39	65.0	100.0
<b>Age</b>			
<31 years	35	58.3	58.3
31 – 40 years	17	28.3	86.7
41 – 50 years	5	8.3	95.0
>51 years	3	5.0	100
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single	40	66.7	66.7
Married	18	30	96.7
Separated/divorced	2	3.3	100
<b>Educational Level</b>			
O'level	20	33.3	33.3
OND/NCE	19	31.7	65.0
HND/BSC	17	28.3	93.3
PGD Level	4	6.7	100.0
<b>Respondents' occupation</b>			
Students	12	20.0	20.0
Business Owner	23	38.3	58.3
Employed	25	41.7	100.0

Table 2: Role of traditional food in tourist satisfaction experience

Total= 60

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Do you believe that traditional food plays a significant role in highlighting the uniqueness of a destination?			
Yes	49	81.7	81.7
No	11	18.3	100.0
Visited any destinations known for their traditional cuisine in the past year?			
Yes	35	58.3	58.3
No	25	41.7	100.0
Ever recommended a destination solely based on its traditional food experience?			
Yes	48	80.0	80.0
No	12	20.0	100.0
What factors influence your decision to try traditional foods during your travels?			
Cultural curiosity	29	48.3	48.3





Local recommendations	20	33.3	81.6
Advert/online reviews	11	18.3	100.0

How do you perceive the role of traditional food in creating a sense of connection and understanding between tourists and the host community?

Neutral	5	8.3	8.3
Lightly	12	20.0	28.3
Strongly	43	71.7	100.0

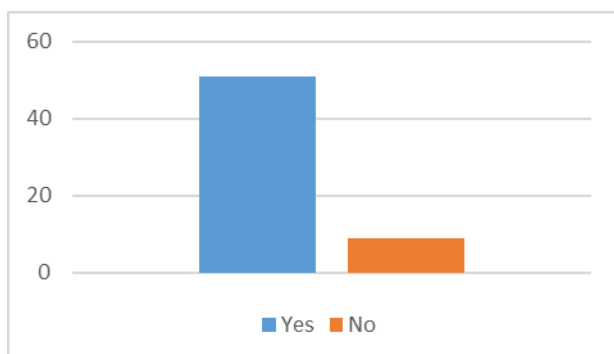
**Table 3: Role of traditional food in promoting tourist destination**

Total= 60

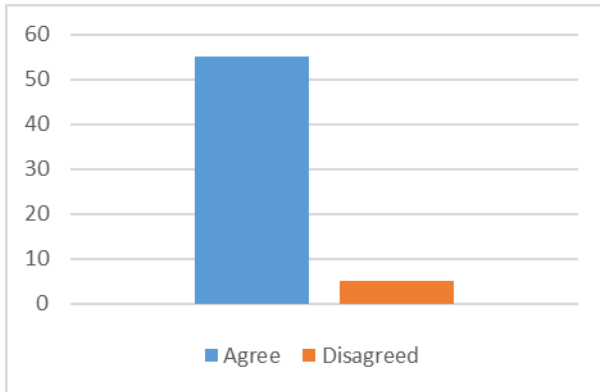
Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percent
<b>Traditional food plays a role in preserving and promoting the local culture of a tourist destination</b>			
Disagreed	2	3.3	3.3
Strongly Disagreed	12	20.0	23.3
Agreed	20	33.3	56.6
Strongly Agreed	26	43.4	100.0
<b>Traditional food can influence the length of stay and spending patterns of tourists in a destination</b>			
Disagreed	5	8.3	8.3
Strongly Disagreed	16	26.7	35.0
Agreed	15	25.0	60.0
Strongly Agreed	24	40.0	100.0
<b>Traditional food and other cultural experiences can enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination</b>			
Disagreed	2	3.3	3.3
Strongly Disagreed	7	11.7	15.0
Agreed	35	58.3	73.3
Strongly Agreed	16	26.7	100.0
<b>Traditional food and other cultural experiences can enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination</b>			
Disagreed	5	8.3	8.3
Strongly Disagreed	16	26.7	35.0
Agreed	15	25.0	60.0
Strongly Agreed	24	40.0	100.0

**Section 4: Interest in Local Food During Travelling**

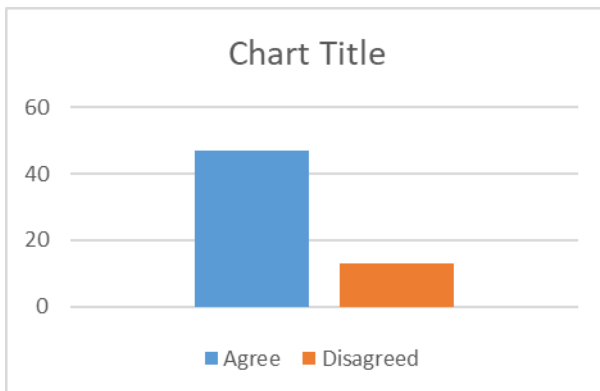
**Fig 1: Do you consider meals when you're traveling?**



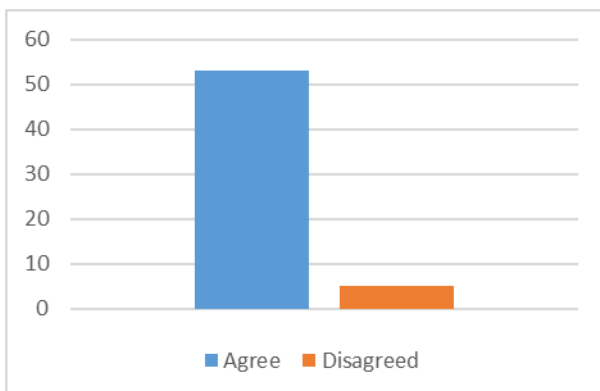
**Fig 2: The quality of my meals is crucial to how satisfied I am with my vacation experience**



**Fig 3: It's important to sample the local cuisine of the host destination.**



**Fig 4: Interested in eating foods prepared using local culinary techniques and methods?**





## **Results discussion**

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents. The profiles of the respondents showed that the number of female respondents (65%) was higher than the male respondents (35%). The age range of the respondents is between <31 and >51 years. In terms of marital status, the number of singles (66.7%) was higher than the number of married (30%) and separated/divorced (3.3%), and majority had an O'level (33.3%), follows immediately is OND/NCE (31.7%). Most of the tourists are employed (41.7%).

Table 2 depicts the role of traditional food in tourist satisfaction experience. Most of the tourists (81.7%) believed that traditional food plays a significant role in highlighting the uniqueness of a destination and (58.3%) had previously visited a destination known for their traditional cuisine. Likewise (80%) had once recommended a destination solely based on its traditional food experience. Majority of the tourists (48.3%) indicated cultural curiosity as a leading factor that influence their decision to try traditional foods during their travels and (71.7%) strongly perceived that traditional food create a sense of connection and understanding between tourists and the host community.

Table 3 indicates the role of traditional food in promoting tourist destination. A large percentage (43.4%) and (33.3%) of the tourists strongly agreed and agreed respectively that traditional food plays a role in preserving and promoting the local culture of a tourist destination; while (26.7%) of the tourists strongly disagreed that traditional food influenced their length of stay and spending patterns in a destination. (58.3%) are of the opinion that traditional food and other cultural experiences enhances the attractiveness of a tourist destination and lastly most of the respondents (24%) strongly agreed that local communities plays a major role in preserving and promoting traditional food to tourists.

Section 4 portray the respondents' interest in local food during travelling. Fig. 1 demonstrated that the majority of travelers (51) think about food when traveling; hence, Fig. 3 (55) felt that their dining experiences were crucial to their overall enjoyment of the trip. As a result, Fig. 3 it was vital to them (47) to eat the local cuisine in the host country. Finally, in Fig. 4, majority also expressed a desire to test foods cooked using local cooking methods and techniques.

## **Discussion**

The study examine the role of traditional foods in tourists' satisfaction experience and its impact on the destination image. The findings of the research revealed that food plays a major influence in tourist satisfaction experience which agree with the finding from Shiji M.N *et al* (2019) and Roozbeh B.H (2016) who reported in their research that the overall satisfaction experience of tourists is a function of a tourist destination that uses food as one of its tourist attractions.

Even though food serves as a popular tourist attraction, a limited study illustrate its importance to tourism promotion. As a result, this study was conducted to demonstrate the significance of traditional food as one of the attraction to a tourist destination and gives them a positive experience. In the course of this study, it was discovered that tourist considers local food as an important factor to have a pleasant experience and factors that influence their decision are cultural curiosity and recommendation from the host community.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the study, it can be affirmed that satisfaction with the destination local food has positive reward to the said destination. This is in line with the study of Ricardo D.H *et al* (2021) who in their research affirmed that visitors satisfaction at the local restaurant has a favorable impact on how people see the cuisine which create a brand and promote the destination image that prompt a revisit by the tourists and recommendation to others. According to Hendijani (2016) and Shiji M.N *et al* (2019) reported in their study that each destination has its own unique food. To further brand the destination image, tourist centers in Abeokuta should come together as one to plan food tour in form of festival from time to time, displaying various local meals with emphasis on locally sourced ingredients. This will appeal to new and revisiting tourists and will serve as means to advertise host destination native food. Hence, these findings imply that tourism agencies and officials should adopt local food strategy to contribute towards the growth of tourism sector. Furthermore, it is recommended that upcoming researchers related to this study should look into the cultural origin of tourists, as this data will help in figuring out the links between tourists cultural origin and their food experiences.





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