

## Decision Making on Participating in Phuket's Gastronomic Tourism: Evidence from European Tourists

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### Abstract

This research was aimed at 1) exploring demographic factors, tourist behavior, and the demand of European tourists participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism and 2) examining the relationships among price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, variety, eating habits, unique cultural experiences, and decision making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. A quantitative method of research was adopted. The samples were European tourists visiting Phuket from December 2023 – February 2024. They were selected using purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument for collecting data was a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data from the samples. The research results were found as follows: 1) It was found that almost 70 percent of the respondents were repeat European tourists of Phuket and that dining experiences were the respondents' demand for participation in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. 2) The regression model analysis found that price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, new eating habits, and unique cultural experiences could predict decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism at a statistical significance of 0.01. However, uniqueness, variety, and unique cultural experiences showed positive relationships with European tourists' decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism at the statistical significance of the 0.01 level.

**Keywords:** creative tourism; decision making; gastronomic tourism; Phuket city municipality

## Introduction

In Thailand, the tourism industry has been one of the largest contributors to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). To maintain and grow this contributor, gastronomic tourism is identified as another driver of the country's tourism industry and staying competitive over its competing countries (Ministry of Tourism & Sports, 2017). It is an emerging tourism sector that can draw both domestic and international tourists to a destination (Jeaheng, et al., 2023). Gastronomic tourism has expanded considerably and has become one of the most diverse and innovative sectors of tourism (Sahin, 2015). In 2017–2019, the total revenues from food and beverages received from foreign tourists were 255,486.18 million baht, 376,131.80 million baht, and 396,595.20 million baht, respectively.

Every time more people travel inspired by the gastronomy highlights of the region, food is no longer a pure complement to a journey but a key element in the process of selecting a tourist destination (López-Guzmán et al., 2012). The emphasis on cultural tourism and the promotion of distinctive local products and experiences, including food and events, has increased (OECD, 2014). One of the most certain factors that tourists intend to consider when selecting a destination is food. Herrera et al. (2012) also supported gastronomic tourists who intend their journeys partially or completely to taste local food or to expand activities related to gastronomy. Thus, gastronomic tourism, or foodie travel, is an important component of visitor experiences. For some travelers, food experiences are the main reason why they travel to their favorite destinations (Getz et al., 2014; McKercher et al., 2008).

UNESCO has declared Phuket City Municipality to be the Phuket Creative City of Gastronomy since 2015 (Lee, 2022; Phakdee-auksorn & Pattaro, 2021). Dining is one of the three activities that tourists are interested in, particularly local food consumption when they visit Phuket. Phuket is characterized by a multicultural society with various ethnicities and religions. Those ethnicities are Thai, Baba Peranakan, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. With this mixture of cultures, local cuisines are unique, and their recipes have been passed on from generation to generation for over a hundred years. (Anantamongkolkul & Thonnam, 2021).

Since gastronomic tourism has become one of the most fascinating and fast-growing topics for research (Kim et al., 2011), most of them investigate perception and sensation, food tourism management, the uniqueness of local food, motivation in food tourism, satisfaction, and local food

consumer behavior. Local food promotion strategy has become an under-researched topic within the gastronomic tourism field. To fill in such a research gap, this research is, therefore, interested in investigating the relationships among the factors influencing decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. The results are expected to contribute to Thailand's gastronomic tourism in the dimension of local food promotion strategies. It is also expected to alleviate Phuket's gastronomic tourism to Thailand's high-potential and creative tourism sector in line with the third National Tourism Development Plan Strategy (2023-2027).

## Objectives

1. It is expected to explore demographic factors, tourist behavior, and demand for European tourists participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.
2. It is expected to examine the relationships among price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, variety, eating habits, unique cultural experiences, and decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

## Scope of research

**Scope of Content:** Gastronomic tourism was the main content of the research, with an emphasis on the factors affecting decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

**Scope of Population and Sample:** This research emphasized tourists' decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, aiming at European tourists who were visiting Phuket and who had tried local cuisines.

**Scope of area:** This research was conducted in Phuket province. It focused on three districts of Phuket, which were Mueang Phuket District, Kathu District, and Thalang District. These three districts were crowded with European tourists staying at the hotels and resorts.

**Scope of time:** This research was conducted from September 2018 to May 2024.

## Literature reviews

### Tourists' Decision-Making Process

The tourist purchasing decision-making process was defined as a selection of products or services from two or more options. Both physical and mental factors were also involved, meaning that the body and brain were utilized to shape the purchase decision and buying behavior. There were five steps in the tourist purchasing decision-making process (Belch & Belch, 2012). Those steps included (1) need recognition, (2) search for information, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchase, and (5) post-purchase evaluation. The first step of the decision-making process was the need for recognition. It referred to the feeling that individuals had when they lacked something, resulting in the need for that thing. When the need had been recognized, consumers would search for information related to the thing they needed, which was the second step of the decision-making process. The third step would begin when consumers evaluated the alternatives derived from the second step. Once the evaluation of alternatives had finished, the next step was that consumers would purchase a product or a service they needed. After the use of the product or service, consumers would assess whether it met or did not meet their needs, which was the post-purchase evaluation step of the decision-making process.

### Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomic tourism is the combination of a place's nature, culture, service, facilities, access, hospitality, and uniqueness. All of this leads to tourists' experiences of that place, especially the ability to sense and test the food and learn the cooking process, which adds value to tourists' experiences (Bertella, 2011). This kind of tourism offers an opportunity to experience the true identity of the place, which is the result of globalization (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Haukeland & Jacobson, 2001). Gastronomic tourism does not only focus on consumption but also the direct experience and knowledge tourists would receive from gastronomic tourism in a particular area (Chang et al., 2011; Sims, 2009; McKercher et al., 2008; Fox, 2007).

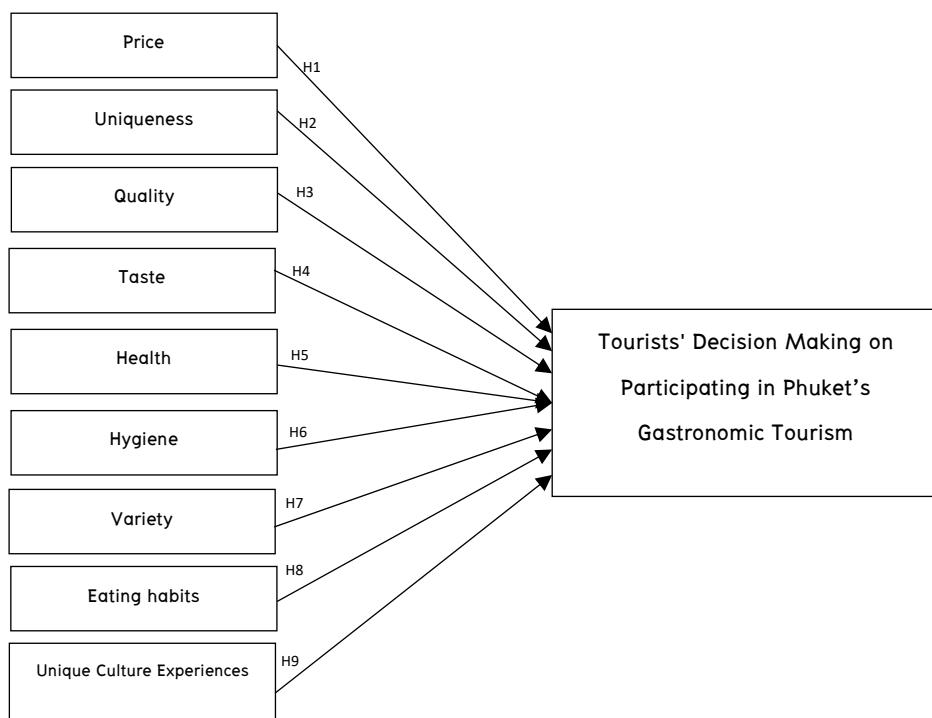
### Factors Influencing Tourists' Decision-Making on Participating in Gastronomic Tourism

Gairdner (2006) revealed that 77 percent of the respondents agreed that local food had 'fresher tastes than alternatives; meanwhile, 67 percent of the respondents agreed that it was better for their health. Mirosa and Lawson (2012) explained that local food involves fewer chemicals

due to shorter transport and storage periods. Local food was considered healthier. Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun (2019) have investigated the dimensions of the destination food image and their effects on the food preferences and consumption among independent Chinese and Australians visiting Phuket. The findings show that restaurant, food taste, health and hygiene, variety and eating habits, and unique cultural experience were five food picture factors of a destination.

As far as tourists' decision-making was concerned, Dahiya and Batra (2016) found that there were six factors exploring the destination choice criteria. Those factors were comfort, climatic conditions, sparkling reception, incredible India, and affordable tourist facilities. Three other factors were found to influence tourists' choice of destination. Such factors included food, events, and nightlife at the tourist destination.

**Based on the literature review and previous studies**, a conceptual framework was developed to examine the relationships among price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, eating habits, unique cultural experience, and decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. It is depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** depicts the conceptual framework of the relationships among the variables.

## Methodology

A quantitative method of research was adopted to achieve the research objectives. The methodology was organized and presented into four sections, which were described as follows:

### 1. Population and Sample

European tourists who were visiting Phuket were the population of this research. It had not been possible to examine all populations; a sample of some respondents that could represent the population was needed. With the number of 1,420,177 European tourists visiting Phuket in 2019 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019), the sample size would be determined based on Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973) at a 95 percent confidence level. Therefore, the total number of samples required for this research would be 400 European tourists visiting Phuket.

### 2. Development of Research Instrument

In response to the research objectives, a questionnaire was selected to serve as a research instrument to acquire the data and information. It was developed based on the literature and previous studies related to gastronomic tourism and consumers' decision-making processes. The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections, which were the screening questions, the respondents' personal information, tourist behavior and demand for participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, the factors influencing the decision to participate in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, tourists' decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, and comments and suggestions. Section 1 presented two screening questions, followed by Section 2, which asked about the respondent's gender, age, nationality, religion, status, monthly income, education, occupation, travel group, and travel budget. Meanwhile, the factors that measured whether they could influence the decision to participate in Phuket's gastronomic tourism were put in Section 3. Such factors included price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, eating habits, and a unique cultural experience. Meanwhile, tourists' decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism was placed in Section 4. All of these 10 factors were designed on the five-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

### 3. Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

The validity of the research instrument was assessed by the index of item-objective congruency (IOC). For the research instrument to be valid, the values of the IOC must be greater than 0.50 (Sirichai et al., 2000). Ten variables in the conceptual framework were examined by

three experts. The results of the IOC were 1.00 (price), 0.96 (uniqueness), 1.00 (quality), 0.93 (taste), 1.00 (health), 1.00 (hygiene), 1.00 (variety), 1.00 (eating habits), 0.98 (unique cultural experience), and 1.00 (decision-making on participating in Phuket's Gastronomic Tourism) which were greater than the cut-off point benchmark.

In terms of the reliability of the research instrument, the pretesting of the questionnaire with 30 non-targeted respondents was performed. The reliability of the research instrument was analyzed by Cronbach's alpha. It was measured by the coefficient values of Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach (1951) suggested that the values should be higher than 0.70. The results showed that the coefficient values of all factors incorporated in the regression model exceeded 0.7, meaning that the research instrument was reliable. The coefficient values of Cronbach's alpha are demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1** demonstrates the results of the reliability of the research instrument through the values of Cronbach's alpha.

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Price	7	0.942
Uniqueness	5	0.951
Quality	5	0.955
Taste	4	0.950
Health	5	0.898
Hygiene	3	0.936
Variety	5	0.948
Eating habits	5	0.948
Unique culture experience	3	0.968
Decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism	8	0.907

#### 4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

With purposive sampling techniques, the data would be collected from the targeted respondents who stayed at the hotels and resorts in three major tourist destinations in Phuket. Those tourist destinations were Mueang Phuket District, Kathu District, and Thalang District. The questionnaires would be distributed to European tourists with a random selection technique. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the collected data. For descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation analyzed the respondents' demographic characteristics and the level of agreement of 10 variables. In contrast, multiple

regression was an inferential statistic that tested nine hypotheses that there existed positive relationships among price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, eating habits, unique cultural experience, and tourists' decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

## Results

**Research objective 1:** it was found that almost 70 percent of the respondents stated that this was not their first time visiting Phuket. All respondents had participated in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. Most of the respondents were male, with 235 male respondents and 165 female respondents. Of the total samples, 120 respondents were aged between 30 and 39 years old, 72 respondents were aged between 40 and 49 years old, 68 respondents were aged between 22 and 29 years old, and 63 respondents were aged between 50 and 59 years old. There were 71 respondents with French nationality, 59 respondents with German nationality, 37 respondents with Belgian nationality, and 23 respondents with Dutch nationality.

Table 2 reports the characteristics of the respondents in the research

Characteristics of the respondents		Number of the respondents	Share of total respondents (%)
Gender	Male	235	58.8
	Female	165	41.3
Age	30 – 39 years old	120	30.0
	40 – 49 Years old	72	18.1
	22 – 29 Years old	68	17.0
	50 – 59 Years old	63	15.75
Nationality	French	71	17.8
	Germany	59	14.8
	Belgium	37	9.3
	Dutch	23	5.8
Religion	Christianity	280	70.0
Status	Single	204	51.0
	Married	152	38.0
Monthly income	Below 15,000 €	198	49.5
	15,001 – 25,000 €	90	22.5
Education	Bachelor's degree	273	68.3
Occupation	Private employees	218	54.5
Travel Group	Solo tourists	142	35.5
	Couple tourists	117	29.3
Travel budget	301 – 400 €	148	37.0
	Below 300 €	138	34.5

280 respondents were Christians. There were 204 respondents with single status and 152 respondents with married status. 198 respondents had a monthly income below 15,000 €, and 90 respondents received a monthly income of 15,001–25,000 €. There were 237 respondents with a bachelor's degree. 218 respondents were private employees. 142 respondents were solo tourists, and 117 respondents were couple tourists. For the travel budget, 148 respondents spent 301–400 € for a trip and 138 respondents spent below 300 euros for a trip.

**Table 3** illustrates the major reasons for eating at Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

Ranking	The major reason that may encourage you to eat at Phuket's gastronomic tourism: (please choose the most important one)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Trying different tastes (4)	160	40.0
2	Trying authentic experiences (3)	155	38.8
3	Unique local spices (2)	26	6.5
4	Experiencing new styles of food presentation (1)	23	5.8
5	Escaping from routine (6)	21	5.3
6	Discovering un-familiar cooking methods (5)	15	3.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 illustrates the results of the major reasons that may encourage the respondents to eat at Phuket's gastronomic tourism. 160 respondents (40.0 percent) stated that their reason for eating at Phuket's gastronomic tourism was "trying different tastes", followed by "trying authentic experiences" (155 respondents, 38.8 percent), "unique local spices" (26 respondents, 6.5 percent), "experiencing new styles of food presentation" (23 respondents, 5.8 percent), "escaping from routine" (21 respondents, 5.3 percent), and "discovering un-familiar cooking methods" (15 respondents, 3.8 percent), respectively.

Table 4 demonstrates the demand for participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

Ranking	Demanding toward participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism (You can choose more than 1 answer)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Dining experiences (2)	216	8.6
2	Consuming local cuisine is full of fun (15)	199	7.9
3	A memorable food experience (7)	191	7.6
4	Cultural experience about local food (3)	186	7.4
5	Dive into local markets (1)	181	7.2
6	Consuming local cuisine is enjoyable (13)	178	7.1

Note: more than one answer allowed

Table 4 demonstrates the results of multiple-choice questions that asked about the demand for participation in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. Most of the respondents demanded that they participated in Phuket's gastronomic tourism because of "dining experiences" (8.6 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice), followed by "consuming local cuisine is full of fun." (7.9 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice), "a memorable food experience" (7.6 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice), "cultural experience about local food" (7.4 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice), "dive into local markets" (7.2 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice), and "consuming local cuisine is enjoyable" (7.1 percent of the respondents that had chosen this choice).

**Research objective 2:** It was found that price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, new eating habits, and unique cultural experiences could predict decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism at the statistical significance of the 0.01 level

( $F=27.724$ ). These predictor variables could explain the variance of decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism by 39.0 percent (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.376$ ), and the value of the standard error of estimate (SEE) was 0.641. Moreover, it was found that uniqueness ( $\beta = 0.474$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), variety ( $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and new cultural experiences ( $\beta = 0.324$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were the factors that could influence decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism among European tourists at the statistical significance of the 0.01 level, which is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5** shows the results of the multiple regression model of the relationships among price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, eating habits, unique culture experiences, and decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

Variables	$R^2 = 0.390$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.376$ , SEE = 0.641, F = 27.724**				
	b	SE	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.118	0.143		14.813	000**
Price	0.32	0.40	0.54	0.799	0.425
Uniqueness	0.258	0.036	0.474	7.123	0.000**
Quality	-0.003	0.044	-0.005	-0.63	0.950
Taste	-0.093	0.049	-0.173	-1.916	0.056
Health	-0.001	0.042	-0.002	-0.33	0.973
Hygiene	-0.084	0.033	-0.144	-2.547	0.011*
Variety	0.139	0.042	0.242	3.313	0.001**
Eating habits	-0.093	0.046	-0.164	-2.026	0.043*
Unique culture experience	0.177	0.039	0.324	4.472	0.000**

Note: \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01

## Discussion

**Research Objective 1:** It was found that the results of this research were different from those of previous studies. Wadolowska et al., (2008), and Amuquandoh (2011) indicated that female tourists were more excited and interested in local food than male tourists. Moreover, Otegui-Carles et al. (2022) supported that a growing number of females have enjoyed gastronomic tourism. In contrast, most of the respondents in this research were male European tourists who were solo and who also participated in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. This could be because the number of male European visitors to Phuket during the last quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024 was greater than female European tourists. It was also found that the dining experience was the demand for participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism among European tourists. The results were in line with the previous research by Kovalenko et al. (2023) which revealed that dining experience influenced their gastronomic experience.

**Research objective 2:** it was found that uniqueness, variety, and unique cultural experience could positively influence the decision to participate in Phuket's gastronomic tourism among European tourists. This could be because Phuket was well-known among tourists for its culinary culture, which had been passed on from generation to generation. Thus, the tourists perceived it as a unique, varied, and unique cultural experience. The results were consistent with

the studies of Phakdee- Aukson et al. (2023), indicating that the variety of food and unique atmosphere were the motivational factors that attracted international tourists to consume local cuisines.

## Conclusion

With the importance of gastronomic tourism in Thailand, the ultimate objective of this research was to identify the factors that could influence decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism among European tourists who were visitors to Phuket. The conceptual framework for examining the relationships among the variables was developed based on a literature review and previous studies. The variables included price, uniqueness, quality, taste, health, hygiene, variety, eating habits, unique cultural experiences, and decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism. Most of the respondents were not first-time or second-time visitors to Phuket. According to the results of the regression analysis, uniqueness, variety, and unique cultural experiences were the predictors of decision-making on participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism.

## Suggestion

Based on the results of the research, the following were lists of suggestions about implications for practice and future studies:

### 1. Implications for practice

Research objective 1: It was found that most of the respondents' demand for participation in Phuket's gastronomic tourism was the dining experience; consuming local cuisine is full of fun, a memorable food experience, a cultural experience about food, diving into local markets, and consuming local cuisine is enjoyable.

As a result, related agencies are highly recommended to increasingly promote Phuket's gastronomic tourism through food events or food festivals that offer Phuket cuisines in an environment filled with the multiculture of Phuket every quarter. Either food events or festivals should be held in the evening.

Research objective 2: it was found that uniqueness, variety, and unique cultural experience were the factors that influence European tourists' decision-making on participating in local food tourism or street food tourism, not the price, quality, taste, health, and hygiene.

Therefore, related agencies were highly recommended to promote and enhance the attractiveness of Phuket cuisine through its uniqueness, variety, and unique cultural experiences. Although health and hygiene demonstrated opposite relationships with decision-making in participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, it is still necessary to incorporate health and hygiene into all Phuket food dishes, including cooking methods. Consequently, related agencies are advised to establish standards for local food and beverages. A team responsible for inspecting local food's nutrition and hygiene should be established. Entrepreneurs of local food should be informed about such standards and required to follow them strictly.

## 2. Future research

For those interested in examining the factors influencing tourists' decisions to participate in Phuket's gastronomic tourism, first-time visitors to Phuket who have already joined Phuket's gastronomic tourism are highly recommended as the population. The results could be compared against the current research.

## New Knowledge

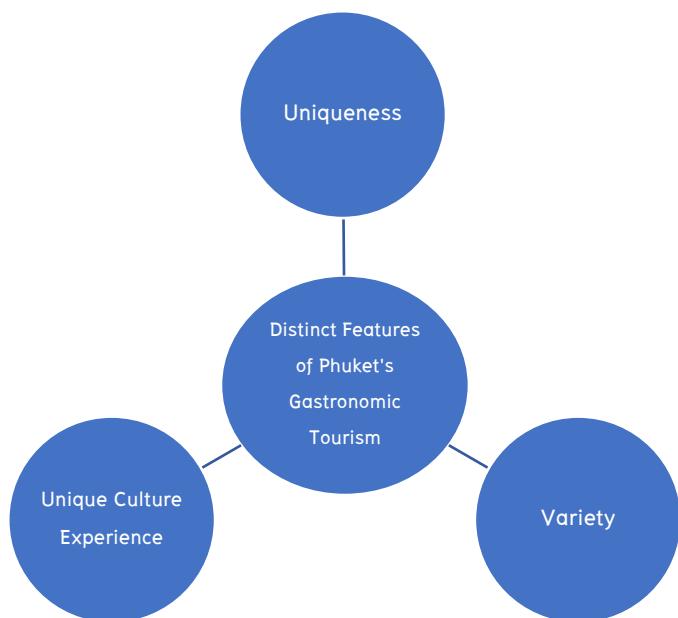


Figure 2 displays the distinct features of Phuket's gastronomic tourism

Figure 2 displays the distinct features of Phuket's gastronomic tourism. Uniqueness is placed on the top of the model due largely to its largest influences on decision-making about participating in Phuket's gastronomic tourism compared to unique cultural experiences and variety, respectively.

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