



POTENTIAL DESTINATION FOR GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the strength of Thailand for being a gastronomic destination using the qualitative study including a literature review and document analysis. The study found three aspects that impel Thailand to be one of the gastronomic destinations, for example, food authenticity, street foods, and local products. Since gastronomy tourism has expanded in Thailand for decades and is one way that generates income for our country. This study found that Thailand has a deep root in authentic delicacies and cooking classes that visitors can indulge in more than flavors. We also comprise an array of street food but food hygiene is what people concern the most. Finally, local products with strong government support are not only generating income but also increasing employment opportunities to the communities.

Keywords: gastronomic destination, food authenticity, street foods.

INTRODUCTION

In late 1990's, tourism industry began to emphasize culinary tourism which is now consist of varieties of formats and products. Numbers of food tourists who took international holidays have been rising from 25 million in 1950 to 1 billion and been forecasting to be about 4 billion by 2050 (Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016), these groups make journey to find the taste regardless of the distance, which most of them

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are wealthy consumers. For decades, there has been a great expansion of gastronomy tourism in Thailand and is accounted not only as part of the drive of tourism business but also the means to spread and tailor food culture, and enhance the possibility of intercultural communication, many premises turn this into an opportunity to promote themselves by using food and beverage as attractions (Getz et al., 2014). Statistic expressed that travellers spent 1/3 of time and expenses on food (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010). A study in 2011 of Kim revealed that the amount of expenditure on food was significantly related to the satisfaction and intention to revisit (Kim et al., 2011). More than 30% of travellers anticipate for good foods during their trips. Over 85% of wealthy tourists keen on experiencing new food menus and consider as the most wanted travel activities (Miller & Washington, 2014).

Gastronomy-tourism market segment is an empirical evidence for the connection between tourism and gastronomy, the literature support from Hong Kong stated that gastronomy had great influence on how tourists experienced destination and some of them would return to resample its local culinary (Kivela & Crofts, 2005). Online survey showed significant positive relationship between food image and intention to visit, the study revealed that Italy has the most favorable food images compared to France and Thailand (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). The greatest factors for being gastronomy destination of Thailand are food authenticity, street food and local products (National Statistic Institute, Online, 2013). While in general, factors that influenced on gastronomy destinations were food and beverages itself, following by climate, accommodation and scenery (McKercher, Okumus & Okumus, 2008). Furthermore, gastronomic tourism supplied the opportunity to food product development sector; including restaurant and cafe owners, cookery school establishments, event organizers, hotel and resort operators and all food producers (Mitchell & Hall, 2004), with an opportunity to publicize destinations that can be incorporated into tourism development strategies as well as to extend the travelling season all year round (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010). More importantly, a case study in Slovenia takes this chance to create sustainable practice in agriculture, food production and tourism development (Bratec, Online, 2008).



OBJECTIVE

This research aims to explore the strength of Thailand for being the gastronomic destination using the qualitative study including literature review and documents analysis.

POTENTIAL DESTINATION FOR BEING GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

The word gastronomy itself was first introduced in France in the last two centuries, when the French author Jacques Berchoux titled his poem *La Gastronomies, ou l'homme des champs table* (Gastronomy, or the peasant at the table). The word became popular and in 1835 was included in the dictionary of the French Academy as 'the art of good eating' (Gillespie & Cousins, 2012). Gastronomy tourism is known widely as one of the food-based tourism schemes, this term was suggested by Wilbur Zelinsky, a cultural photographer in 1985. Later in 1996, culinary tourism was introduced by folklorist Lucy Long, the meaning involved the participation in consumption, preparation and presentation of a food item (Long, 2013).

Gastronomy tourism is defined as the travel pattern that aims to experience local heritage through local food, regardless the travel distance (Kesimoğlu, 2015). When food has become major component of tourism, equivalent to weather, accommodation and attractions, local and authentic cuisine is not only drawn to catch attention and be part of many campaign, from flight meals, street food to fine dining and motivate people (Andersson, Mossberg & Therkelsen, 2017) to travel for food in particular places (Kritsanaprakobkit, 2017). Visitors are able to learn local culture and buy material products as they pay a visit or participate in food related activities in the communities, for example, food testing, events or local markets (Richards & Hall, 2003) while locals use food to tell their stories and identities (Molz, 1998), hence, allow tourists to indulge in more than the flavors.

Although the whole space of Thailand could not represent as tourist attraction but can participate as parts of tourism chain. As our deep root of history plus diversity of arts and culture, authentic Thai cuisine serves as fascinating and fulfilling attractions that lately become food destination for people from around the world. In fact, Thailand has shown to be very supportive as the following plan; Thai National



Economic and Social Development Plan, from 8th to 11th (1997-2016), takes human as a resource of expansion and build up natural resource for social reinforcement and great profit (Pullphothong & Sopha, Online, 2013). Government websites introduce and advertise informative content for culinary tourists such as food culture, restaurants and gastronomic tour (Horng & Tsai, 2010).

Food authenticity

Thailand has diversity in natural resources, foods, cultures and traditions. In terms of culinary, our gastronomy profile is strong and quite different from other countries nearby (Sukenti, 2014). Authenticity is widely used by hosts and market traders at tourist destinations. It may varies through the products, due to personal experience, motivation and expectation and is recommended that by enhancing the engagement in food culture of tourists may be an alternative strategy to promote traditional food markets (Lunchaprasith & Macleod, 2018).

Besides authentic flavors, Thai cuisine has been assimilated and accumulated from multi-nations, for instance, Chinese, Portuguese as well as Muslim culinary which resulted in various ways in reflects in the uniqueness of taste and ingredients, for example, the world's most recognized food as Tom Yum (Karim et al., 2009). A study of gastronomic tourism in Ayutthaya mentioned that Thai noodle soup or as known as Kuay Teaw Rue, Grilled River Prawns, Roti-Sai Mai (a dessert made from candy floss with rice paper, a Thai-Muslim influenced dish) are the most popular dishes among Thai and foreigners who paid a visit there As of now, Ayutthaya has become one of gastronomic destinations of Thailand; Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is attempted to set-up the niche market of gastronomy destination in various means from starting a collaborative projects with culinary institutes, combine local foods, souvenirs and culture in a package to developing innovative attractions, since Ayutthaya has the potential in the sense of strong authentic multicultural culinary products (Pullphothong & Sopha, Online, 2013). Other well known food destinations among tourist such as Bangkok where is called culinary heaven; Yaowaraj and Kao San Road are accounted as frequent visit by tourists and Thais (Wattanavrangkul, Online, 2017). Regarding the northern area, Chiang Mai with its own culinary tradition delicacies such as Khao Soi (noodle soup). Or a place close to Bangkok like Hua Hin where the seafood is known as its showcase (Nemo Guides, Online, 2019).



In addition, some studies expressed that authentic home cooking gradually infiltrate into visitors' travel experience (Bell, 2015). Cooking schools are accounted as one of the development of experiential food tourism in Thailand that contemporary food tourists seek for its authentic and sustainable experience. The business, in particular, expands toward especially niche market, small scale and local ones that attract not only foreigners but local Thais as well (Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2019).

Street foods

The consumption of street foods can be traced back to the Roman period; however, today's meaning has changed compared to the past. FAO was given the meaning of street food as "street food is made from food and drink prepared for consumption, prepared and sold on the street or in other public places such as markets and/or exhibitions, often sold on counters or through temporary vans and carts street vendors" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO), 2004). FAO also mentioned that street food is consumed by 2.5 billion people each day. Thailand has approximately 20,000 street food vendors which supply around 40% of energy for population (Bellia, Pilato & Seraphin, 2016). A case study in Phuket that offers an array of food specialties, indicates that among these element; hygiene, affection, food quality, service quality, satisfaction and value, affection, service quality and satisfaction show to be in top priorities of tourists behavioral intention toward street food while other factors are not considered as important (Chavarria & Phakdee-auksorn, 2017).

One of major concern about street food is food safety, according to World Health Organization (WHO) defines as a protection of food supply from microbial, physical and chemical hazards that may occur at any point of production from farm to table to prevent food borne disease. Regarding local food stalls and discourses, where food are prepared and sold open to contamination and pollution plus insufficient hygiene practice of sellers (Sezgin & Şanlıer, 2016). The concern of food safety has significant impact on tourists to be suspicious of local foods and beverages (Savadori et al., 2004), especially for every summer in Southeast Asian countries over past several decades that evidence of food borne illness emerged. However, Thailand has improved food standard and water safety significantly and help reduce these incidents (Wongleedee, 2013).



Local products

Traditional markets such as river or floating market represents Thai traditional way of life and is accounted as important tourists attractions. Floating market has been used to promote local community tourism by local authorities. Traditionally, the meaning of market in Thailand is understood as a place to buy and sell consumer goods in daily life that could occur on both land and river (Rattanareuthai, 2006). To sustain local products and retailers are the way to preserve local wisdom and generate income from locals and tourists. In addition, local or community products can be exported as another means to earn foreign currencies. According to a research of (Wongleedee, 2015), consumers have positive attitudes towards goods of traditional markets as these following aspects; quality of goods, value to money to quantity and lastly, price bargaining and standard pricing. In addition, their satisfaction influences on the willing to revisit and recommendation to others.

Another outstanding example could be “One Tambon One Product”, this concept refers to locals products such as handicrafts, pottery, garments, household utensils and foods (Boonratana, 2010). OTOP started in 2001 under strong government initiative (Kurokawa, 2009), and is a channel to market local produces and increase employment opportunity for community (Natsuda et al., 2012). It was mentioned to be one of the element of visitors’ passive participation in community based tourism (CBT) (Boonratana, 2009), where local residents make use of their solid identity (unique product or service) to invite tourists to experience local lifestyle and culture of their community (MICE Intelligence Team, Online, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Marketing opportunities: Implication and limitation

Regarding an intense rivalry marketing segment, the uniqueness is used as a source to develop, introduce and market the destination (Uner, 2014). Gastronomic related activities at particular places supply direct and indirect financial income and also employment opportunities (Sahin, 2015). Furthermore, gastronomy festivals, courses or even museums have vital roles in promoting and marketing of destinations (Sormaz et al., 2016).



Firstly, the uniqueness of local cuisines does matters since tourists expected to experience different cultures and authentic cuisine of that particular place. In fact, authenticity makes a trip even more special and bring destination to the lime light, food and beverages consumption convey symbolic meanings for its origin rather than physiological needs (Çalışkan, 2013). Surprisingly, what have been found turns out to be more or less copies of each other, the taste that adjusts to suit Westerners' preference and same old menus like Pad Thai or green curry (Nemo Guides, Online, 2019) or cooking schools that are prone to be more of touristic entertainment, but not represent strong Thai historical background nor culinary culture education (Walter, 2017).

Secondly, Thai street food is widely accepted by visitors due to the variety of ethnic delicacies and reasonable price range. Therefore, food safety and hygiene issues may originate from international visitors witness the unhygienic local vendors' preparation of food with bare hands (Cohen & Avieli, 2004) and they could have over warning regarding the fear of food borne illness.

Thirdly, as for local products, OTOP is the government policy which is totally different from the prototype "OVOP (One Village One Product)" from Japan which is an endogenous movement. OTOP products are supported by Thai government in human resource development. The earnest effort in Thai product development results in high product quality. Effective website-based marketing and technology exchange assist community to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Kurokawa, 2009).

All of above mentioned are corresponded with H.E. Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, the Minister of Sports and Tourism, Thailand, mentioned important measures that are being considered for the implementation upon arrivals of the governor and the government, for instance, vendors must be strictly followed universal hygienic standards, all personnel will be required to attend and pass the training program organized by the city, appropriate procedures of dish cleaning and waste management, local identity and aiming for sustainability (Wattanavrangkul, 2017).

Culinary tourism seems to be an inseparable part of Thai tourism business and society. When there is a business, there is an opportunity. In fact, gastronomy is the way Thai people inherit the culture and lifestyle through local delicacy from past to



present and also gradually increase the development and continuity to many businesses from farms, community, schools to service businesses. Different part of Thailand has its own uniqueness in local cuisine and products and with community engagement and government support; these potential factors will certainly make Thailand to be one of the gastronomic destinations. However, we need to continue our quality of authenticity, food safety and originality of products in order to maintain the revisit of our visitors.

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