

## Developing Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty through Local Food Authentication, Destination Image and Travel Experiences

การพัฒนาความภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหารผ่านความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่น  
ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว และประสบการณ์ทางการท่องเที่ยว

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### Abstract

This study aims to propose and verify a conceptual model of tourist destination loyalty in the Thai gastronomy industry, by considering the concept of local food authentication, tourist experience, and the destination image of gastronomy tourism. The data were obtained from 459 Thai tourists who have traveled and experienced local cuisine in Trang using a survey-based approach with purposive sampling. The constructs' factorial validity, the proposed model's goodness of fit, and the hypotheses are assessed using the statistical software for social sciences. Five research experts evaluated the survey's content validity using the Index of Item - Objective Congruence (IOC), and found that the Cronbach's alpha values of all constructs exceeded the 0.70 thresholds. The model provides an acceptable fit to the data ( $X^2 = 1041.399$ ,  $df = 369$ ,  $GFI = .984$ ,  $NFI = .954$ ,  $CFI = .948$ ,  $AGFI = .968$ ,  $RMSEA = .073$ ). The image of Thailand as a gastronomy tourism destination, which in turn influences destination loyalty was also investigated in this study. The results of this study indicate that local food authentication has a significant impact on the tourist experience and the destination's image as a gastronomy tourism spot/geographical location, which in turn influences destination loyalty. While local food authentication statistically affects destination loyalty, tourist experience on the other hand was found to have direct affects on the destination's image. Consequently, the most significant contribution of this research is related to the fact that stakeholders have a better understanding of the critical factors associated with gastronomy tourism; thus, allowing the proposal of strategies and the concept of creativity to be implemented in improving local food authenticity as well as a tourist experience, thereby enhancing destination image and loyalty in the context of gastronomy tourism.

**Keywords:** Destination Image, Destination Loyalty, Gastronomic Tourism, Local Food Authentication, Tourist Experience

### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเสนอและตรวจสอบโมเดลเชิงแนวคิดของความภักดีต่อแหล่งท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหารโดยนำแนวคิดความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่น ประสพการณ์การท่องเที่ยวและภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยว ข้อมูลได้จากกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยซึ่งมีประสบการณ์ในการท่องเที่ยวและลิ้มลองรสชาติของอาหารท้องถิ่นในจังหวัดตรัง โดยใช้วิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงจำนวน 459 คน การศึกษาครั้งนี้ใช้โปรแกรมคอมพิวเตอร์ทางสถิติในด้านสังคมศาสตร์ในการวิเคราะห์ความเที่ยงตรงเชิงโครงสร้าง ค่าความน่าเชื่อถือของแบบจำลอง และการทดสอบสมมติฐาน แบบสอบถามมีค่าดัชนีความสอดคล้องจากการประเมินจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญจำนวน 5 ท่านส่งผลต่อความเที่ยงตรงเชิงเนื้อหาเหมาะสมและสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ ค่าสัมประสิทธิ์อัลฟาของครอนบาคของทุกตัวแปรมีค่าที่ยอมรับได้คือสูงกว่า 0.7 ขึ้นไป ค่าดัชนีวัดความสอดคล้องของโมเดลอยู่ในระดับที่ยอมรับได้ ( $X^2 = 1041.399$ ,  $df = 369$ ,  $GFI = .984$ ,  $NFI = .954$ ,  $CFI = .948$ ,  $AGFI = .968$ ,  $RMSEA = .073$ ) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่นส่งผลต่อประสพการณ์การท่องเที่ยวและภาพลักษณ์ในฐานะที่เป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหาร ซึ่งส่งผลต่อความภักดี นอกจากนั้น ยังพบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่นและความภักดี และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประสพการณ์ของการท่องเที่ยวและภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยวดังกล่าว ดังนั้น ผลการวิจัยครั้งนี้ส่งผลให้ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียมีความรู้ความเข้าใจที่ดีขึ้นเกี่ยวกับปัจจัยที่สำคัญในการท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหาร อีกทั้งในด้านกลยุทธ์และแนวคิดด้านความคิดสร้างสรรค์ที่ช่วยในการพัฒนาความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่นและประสพการณ์การท่องเที่ยว เพื่อนำไปสู่การเพิ่มขีดความสามารถทางด้านภาพลักษณ์และความภักดีในบริบทของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหารด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** การท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหาร, ความจริงแท้ของอาหารท้องถิ่น, ความภักดี, ประสพการณ์การท่องเที่ยว, ภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยว

## Introduction

Due to their similar meanings, "gastronomy, food, and culinary tourism" are all used interchangeably (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018) and their associated businesses have emerged as a significant player in the hospitality sectors of many destination countries as a result of travelers' interest in the origins of local products, food, and beverages. Baloglu and McCreary (1999) noted that food has become highly relevant in motivating tourists to travel to other locations. Georgios, Aristidis, Federica, Vladimir, and Constantinos (2016) asserted that travelers are increasingly significant in discovering the primary source of food and beverage products due to the proliferation of food products from other countries in the market. In other words, food and beverages are frequently used to convey information about a country's way of life, uniqueness, and culture. Cavicchi and Stancova (2016) argued that food serves as a bridge between tourists and surroundings, allowing for recognizing regional origins. As defined by Hall and Shraples (2003), gastronomy tourism is a type of travel that combines an interest in food with tourism activities such as food fairs, food festivals, food tasting, visiting food producers, or cooking demonstrations for entertainment and recreation. Quan and Wang (2004) confirm that more than a third of tourist expenditures are on food. Food has long been a significant draw for tourists, and numerous cities have attempted to provide visitors with unique gastronomic experiences (Tsai & Wang, 2017). According to a study conducted by Geng-qing Chi, AbKarim, and Gursoy (2010), gastronomy tourism has acted as a catalyst for local economic development. Additionally, utilizing food experience can help strengthen branding and marketing efforts for destinations. Lin, Pearson, and Cai (2010). Food (2010) confirmed that cities, regions, and countries attempted to strengthen their tourism marketing by utilizing their unique culinary attractions and indigenous foods. As a result, this tourism sector is rapidly growing (Kim, Kim, & Goh, 2011), and competition in the domestic and international gastronomy tourism market is becoming fierce.

Thailand's food is renowned for its inventiveness and diversity. The government continues to promote gastronomy tourism to remain competitive in the tourism industry. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has devised an effective marketing campaign titled "Amazing Thailand Go Local." The campaign's seven pillars are "Local Heroes, Local Strength, Enjoy Local, SET in the Local, Eat Local, Local Link and Our Local" (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). Additionally, the TAT and the Thai government collaborate to boost domestic tourism to 70 million by year-end (Worrachaddejchai, November 20, 2020). Therefore, local products and services are enhanced to attract additional domestic visitors. Trang is a stunning beach province in Thailand, with 199 kilometers of Andaman sea coastline (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023). Trang is a secondary tourism destination in Thailand, featuring unique natural and maritime attractions, regional foods such as grilled pork in the Trang style, Trang cakes, Dim Sum, and even a diverse population of nationalities. Moreover, the accommodation alternatives are diversified, providing guests with additional possibilities. Trang, also known as 'The City of Happiness,' can be enjoyed by travelers by eating local dishes and seeing the city. Despite its competitiveness, tourism in

Trang grew by only 4% in 2018, compared to the rest of southern Thailand (Trang Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, 2020). Unchaprasith and Macleod (2018) claim that although food tourism is becoming more popular in Thailand, it has not yet realized its full potential. Earlier research on food tourism has examined Thailand's gastronomic strengths (Kithwang, 2020), the SWOT analysis of southern creative food tourism (Nakawat & Dhamabutra, 2018), and the five driving forces of change in food tourism (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2016), and compiling lists of regional cuisines (Kritmanrote & Disatapundh, 2019). Qualitative approaches were used in the initial investigations. Additionally, the effect of gastronomic travel experiences on sharing experiences, the mediator role of place attachment (Soonsan & Somkai, 2021), and the effect of visitors' local food consumption values on future behavior (Chunkajorn & Na Thalang, 2020) are investigated in the literature. However, research on gastronomic tourism is quite limited in understanding local food authentication, destination image, and tourist loyalty (Okumus, 2021; Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2017). In other words, when the notions of authenticity, tourist experience, and image are combined, the context of gastronomy tourism in Thailand remains limited. Since the principles of authenticity, tourist experience, and destination image affect Thai or domestic tourist loyalty, the author was interested in exploring the potential of its local food based on the identity of Trang province, Thailand, and in formulating guidelines for gastronomic tourism.

### Research Objectives

1. To assess the potential of local food in terms of local food authentication, tourist experience, destination image as a gastronomy tourism, and destination loyalty.
2. To investigate the relationships among local food authentication, tourist experience, destination image and destination loyalty.

### Literature Review

Due to the increasing competitiveness of Thailand's tourism sector, the destination is embracing local food to differentiate itself. According to Everett and Aitchison (2008), the cuisine served at a destination shapes its identity. Additionally, the substantial socio-cultural ties of local food compel guests to experience it through indigenous flavors and culinary traditions (Chatzinakos, 2016). Therefore, exploring the potential of local cuisine to boost competitiveness, tourism, and revenue is required (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Furthermore, local food potential must be readily available to facilitate development, administration, and execution to succeed.

#### Destination Loyalty

Tourism research has long emphasized the importance of destination loyalty (Li, Aham-Anyanwu, Tevrizci, & Luo, 2015). A loyal consumer is a valuable asset for marketing and hospitality industry (Blackston, 1995). Long-term profitability and a firm's performance are correlated with brand loyalty (Salegna & Goodwin, 2005). As per previous research, repeat consumers spend more and stay longer. Additionally, they are satisfied and generate good word of mouth, which reduces marketing costs (Zhang, Wu & Buhalis, 2018; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Data were

drawn from the existing research; the researcher focused on two critical aspects of loyalty: the intention to return and the desire to recommend the goods and services provided at the destination to others (Khasawneh & Alfandi, 2019; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016). In order to fully understand consumer loyalty in terms of intent to return to gastronomic tourism, profitability must be enhanced, and the destination's position must be retained. The willingness to recommend a gastronomic tourism destination to others, such as friends, family, and relations, is another indicator of a visitor's loyalty to the destination. The growing number of tourists is attributed to that site because gastronomy travelers play a vital part in enhancing the area's reputation by spreading favorable word-of-mouth about it (Marrocu & Paci, 2013). Tourist loyalty develops due to satisfaction manifested by patronage and repeats purchases, fostering word-of-mouth behavior (Oliver, 1999). Different types of devoted tourists behave differently, for example, by engaging more profoundly in consumptive activities and staying longer at the site (Li, Aham-Anyanwu, Tevrizci, & Luo, 2015). Traditionally, word-of-mouth has been seen as the outcome of visitors using services (Ha & Jang, 2010). According to Balter (2008), tourists' loyal behavior increases purchases of products and services, resulting in a successful customer engagement.

#### **Local Food Authentication**

Consumers, regulators, and producers have always been concerned about authenticity (Posudin, Peiris, & Kays, 2015). Krystallis (2017) defines "authenticity" as an object's genuineness. Authenticity is a notion that arises in several disciplines, including social sciences, geography, cultural studies, heritage, and tourism (Mckercher & duCros, 2002; Burnett, 2001). Huanxi (2018) noted that authenticity is often used in heritage and tourism studies. Authentication has several meanings in terms of cultural resources and tourism. For example, "authentication" means "anything is genuine and original, can be proven, or follows tradition" (Duffy & Smith, 2003). According to Lindholm (2008), authenticity is "sincere, essential, natural, origin and real," whereas Sharpley defines it as "a sense of the genuine, real or unique". To be honest, anything must be trustworthy, genuine, authentic, or original, as mentioned by Cohen and Cohen (2012). Timmon and Boyd (2003) concluded that authenticity in tourism refers to feelings and mental perceptions about objects and places that tourists experience upon returning home. According to Yu and Littrell (2003), tourists always find authentic goods and buy authentic homemade souvenirs. Cohen (2007) provides a generic notion of authentication as genuineness in the sense of total product and inventiveness in cultural performance such as music and dance. Cohen's concept also alludes to long-standing usage and sincerity in relationships. The other idea is the flow of life without management or tourism (Cohen, 2007). Thus, the tourism sector considers local food as a cultural-based commodity. The authenticity of its local cuisine can describe the culture of a location (Zhang, Chen & Hu, 2019). Robinson and Getz (2014) stated that local food conveys a sensory expression of local culture. In other words, tourists seeking authenticity in their travel experiences rely heavily on local cuisine (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2017). The literature covers several types of local food authentication. Thus, this study defines Trang local

food as the genuineness of local food which specific to a place and a kind of description of local culture (Zhang, Chen & Hu, 2019) by employing the local food authentication (e.g., local ingredients, unique cooking methods, local taste, and local food culture) (Zhang, Chen, & Hu, 2019; Ozdemir & Seyitoglu, 2017; Youn & Kim, 2017).

### **Tourist Experience**

Experience is regarded as an essential factor in predicting tourist behavior. The tourist experience includes perception, behavior, emotion, and cognition (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Tourists nowadays spend money on experiences rather than things. side from this, the destination should organize activities to guarantee a positive perception of the experience. To better serve tourists, they could also enhance their existing practices. Finally, grateful customers are a potent marketing weapon in a highly competitive sector like the food tourism industry. Experience in this study refers to a distinct economy that provides goods, services, and memories to particular personnel (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This study focuses on the work of Pine and Gilmore (2011, 1999), or Pine and Gilmore's experience economy paradigm, even if earlier research studied different factors that led to the formation of tourist experiences (the 4Es). According to Pine and Gilmore (2002), this paradigm gives the hedonic-experimental view of customer behavior and may be effectively utilized to examine tourists' vacation experiences in both hotels and restaurants. The study by Moon and Han (2018) has proved that the tourist experience is a two-way interaction between destinations and visitors or on-site encounters; in other words, visitors are the players, and the destination is the setting of the experience. Instead of focusing on only tourists, other variables such as location and culture are required for on-site encounters because tourism industries share the staging, production, and experience consumption (O'Dell, 2007). In several earlier studies, the 4Es were also applied to other segments of the service sector, such as wine tourism (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012), heritage trails (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007), cruises (Hosany & Witham, 2010), bed and breakfasts (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007), and memorable events (Pullman & Gross, 2003). However, there is little research on how the 4Es apply to food tourism in Thailand. The study of Pine II and Gilmore, which presented four basic principles of experience, including aesthetics, entertainment, education, and escapism, has thus been employed in this study. Through interactive communication, educational experiences can improve travelers' abilities and knowledge. According to this study, participating in unique activities with others, such as cooking courses for regional cuisine, might help tourists' knowledge and skills for gastronomic tourism. An aesthetic experience, which is characterized as the consumer appreciating a sensory-rich setting, is another area. In other words, when visitors travel for gastronomic tourism, presenters interact with them during their unique events. The term "entertainment experience" describes how the business offering occupies the customer's attention. The consumer is an active player or participant who changes events in the other dimension, which is an escapism experience.

### Destination Image

Numerous empirical and theoretical studies on the importance of image have been conducted in the fields of environmental planning, geography, psychology (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), marketing, and behavioral science (Crompton, 1979). As Jenkins (1999) notes, however, the concept of the destination image is debatable. Consequently, the literature contains numerous definitions. For instance, highly cited experts Echtner and Ritchie (1991) stated that image is a subset of the considerably broader area of imaging research. Keller (1993) defined brand image as the consumer's recollection of a brand as expressed through brand associations. Moreover, earlier studies defined destination image as a person's ideas, anticipations, sentiments, and attitudes toward a particular place (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Crompton (1979) defines destination image as "the sum of an individual's beliefs, thoughts, and impressions of a location". This study defines destination image as the sum of tourists' beliefs, feelings, and impressions about the place through its local cuisine using research by Crompton (1979). Understanding a destination's culinary image is a relatively new field of study (Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2017). The image of a place is fundamentally influenced by its cuisine. Enhancing a place's appeal is crucial since the food there greatly impacts its reputation or image (Hu & Ritchie, 1993). This is because traditional food serves as a proxy for national, regional, and individual characteristics (Henderson, 2009), good quality (e.g., lots of herbs and spices, clean and safe, and food availability), food culture (e.g., flavorful, well-presented, and local food culture was delivered), atmospheric (e.g., overall interior, layout, and facility aesthetic, and the view from the dining area), and context-specific features were considered (e.g., the typical food was unique, and variety of local specialties).

Therefore, this study focused on Trang province as a gastronomy tourism destination and used the concept of destination image from Baloglu and McCleary (1999), which incorporate three main aspects of a place or destination's image including cognitive, affective, and global ones. Several researchers noted that food is regarded as the primary key of destination image (e.g., Lertputtarak, 2012; Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012), which in turn helps tourists to learn about new cultures of locals (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2017) as well as motivates them to travel because of pleasurable sensory experience (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017). The cognitive image is the effect of hearing or seeing the media. Tourists' perceptions of diverse tourist attractions create beliefs and knowledge. Tourists are motivated by the uniqueness of each tourist attraction, its traditions, and its culture. Compelling images are another facet of the destination image. Its information influences tourists' thoughts and sentiments about a destination. The global image is formed by tourists' evaluations of various attributes of a place (cognitive image), resulting in a holistic or overall image, which in turn reflects tourists' sentiments toward the destination's overall image, namely appearance according to various characteristics of areas like landscapes, wildlife, and anecdotes. In short, it affects the province or country's image.



### Hypotheses development

The empirical research findings, which employed the proposed model, were intended to clarify the relationships between the aforementioned constructs. Consequently, six hypotheses were presented forth, as seen in figure 1.

Authenticity has always been seen as a vital aspect of the culinary tourism experience (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). Numerous experts argued that the authenticity of ethnic food might serve as a barometer of the tourism experience (e.g., Lego & Wood, 2003). Forbes (2016) stated that due to their increased income and expertise, modern travelers are keener to spend money on holiday in order to have a unique experience and learn something new. Similarly, travelers visiting other regions constantly discover food unique to their hometown, allowing them to adjust to new cultures, tastes, and fragrances outside of their routine. Also, foods and beverages can permeate visitors' experiences while traveling to various areas and nations (Björk, Björk, Kauppinen-Räsänen & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). They can also learn about new cultures when they sample new local cuisines. The World Tourism Organization (2012) notes that the food or gastronomic experience is the primary factor influencing modern tourists' expectations of sample local cuisine or ingredients at each popular destination. On the other hand, Cohen and Avieli (2004) indicated that visitor experience directly affected destination loyalty. Finally, Andersson, Mossberg, and Therkelsen (2017) have verified the association between traveler experience and loyalty. Similarly, Thai tourists who have traveled to the city of gastronomy, or Trang, are willing to return and suggest the location to others by word of mouth. As a result, the following hypotheses have been proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Local food authentication has a positive effect on the tourist experience.

Hypothesis 2: Tourist experience has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

As per the literature, only a few past studies have looked at the connection between authentic local cuisine and destination loyalty, particularly in gastronomy tourism. However, earlier studies have found a link between destination loyalty and the genuineness of the cuisine. The results showed that the authenticity of local foods has a direct impact consumers' destination loyalty (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Meethan, & Fields, 2015). Furthermore, a recent study by Zhang, Chen, & Hu (2019) confirmed the relationship between loyal tourists and authentic cuisine. Thus, a deep understanding of Thai tourists' perceptions of local food authentication and destination is required when Trang as a gastronomy tourism destination is to succeed globally. Following the debate above, the next hypothesis was developed for this study:

Hypothesis 3: Local food authentication has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

Few research studies have examined the relation between authentic local food, destination image as a gastronomy tourism destination, and destination loyalty due to the significance of this study. This relationship must be developed in the framework of food or gastronomy tourism in the hopes that the authenticity of local food in Trang can help build not only the destination's image and Thai tourists' loyalty to this destination for gastronomy tourism but also the destination's competitiveness in a globalized food tourism industry. It is evident that authenticating



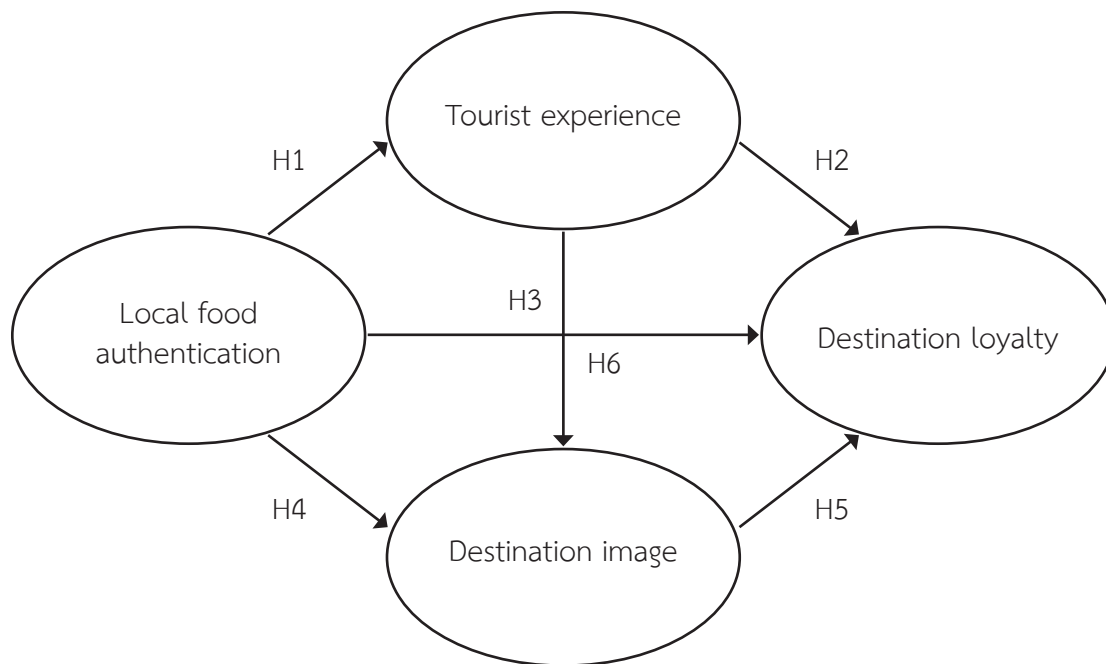
local food as a part of cultures can help Trang grow as a destination for culinary tourism. Numerous earlier studies sought to examine the direct and indirect correlations between the components mentioned above, including local cuisine authenticity, destination image as a gastronomy tourist destination, and destination loyalty in terms of returning and recommending intentions (Chiu, Zeng, & Cheng, 2016; Oliver, 1999; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). More precisely, as Kim and Eves (2012) indicate, travelers' enjoyment of local food and drink can build the destination's image, which has a beneficial effect on their loyalty. The destination image is essential for post-behavioral intentions, as mentioned by Tasci and Gartner (2007). An earlier study demonstrated relationships between local cuisine authenticity, gastronomy tourism destination image, and destination loyalty, and the following hypotheses were formulated.

Hypothesis 4: Local food authentication has a positive effect on destination image as a gastronomy tourism.

Hypothesis 5: Destination image as a gastronomy tourism has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

The final hypothesis investigated the relationship between the travel experiences of Thai tourists and the image of Trang as a gastronomic tourism destination. According to Bjork et al. (2016), local food and beverages along with studying cultures in a variety of ways, have been identified as significant aspects in contributing to tourists' experiences while travelling to other countries. In response, when tourists have a positive experience with local food and cultural events, it is indisputable that their tourist experiences help to reinforce the destination's image, as demonstrated by the Kim et al. study (2012). Furthermore, Yulianti and Tung (2013) validated the association between brand image and experience in the context of Indonesian Facebook users in the following year. Similarly, the current study indicates that Thai tourists gain local experience in Trang through local food products and cultural events, which can help to reinforce the destination image as a gastronomy tourism destination. As a result, the final hypothesis was formulated.

Hypothesis 6: Tourist experience through local food has a positive effect on destination image as a gastronomy tourism.



**Figure 1** Conceptual model.

Source: Developed by the author.

Note: Adapted from Zhang, Wu & Buhalis (2018); Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen (2017); Björk, Björk, Kauppinen-Räsänen, & Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016); Chiu, Zeng, & Cheng (2016); Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Meethan, & Fields (2015); Getz, Robinson, Andersson, & Vujicic (2014); Jalis, Che, & Markwell (2014); Yulianti & Tung (2013); Kim, Kim, & Goh (2011); Ramkissoon & Uysal (2011); Tasci & Gartner (2007); Cohen & Avieli (2004); Lego & Wood (2003); Oliver (1999); Anderson & Sullivan (1993)

## Methodology

### Instrument Development

This questionnaire-based quantitative research method was used to collect data and validate earlier study assumptions. The surveys included statements about the study's constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The research questionnaire consists of five sections: demographics, local food authentication, tourist experience, destination image as a gastronomy tourism, and destination loyalty. Additional comments or suggestions regarding culinary tourism in Trang province, Thailand are included in this questionnaire. For each study component, the current study utilized previously validated evaluation item statements. Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) state that each element in this study comprises a minimum of three measuring items. This study's components were evaluated using a Five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree." Six items from the study of Zhang, Chen and Hu (2019), Özdemir and Seyito (2017) and, Youn and Kim (2017) were used in investigating local food authentication. In addition, from a study by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate 14 items of destination image as a gastronomy tourism. The tourist experience was

evaluated based on its educational value, entertainment value, aesthetic value, and escapism value. These 16 items are based on prior research (Thayarnsin, 2020; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Finally, this study determined destination loyalty in Trang province using seven items. The author developed these items based on prior research (Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001).

**Table 1** Study variables

Variable	Statement	Number of items	Source
Local food authentication (LCF)			
	LCF1: Local ingredients.	6	Zhang, Chen and Hu (2019)
	LCF2: Traditional cooking techniques.		
	LCF3: The presentation of regional food is appealing and authentically reflects Trang's personality.		Özdemir and Seyito (2017)
	LCF4: The flavour of ethnic food is distinct and different from that of other provinces.		Youn and Kim (2017)
	LCF5: The local food establishments have a distinct and unique ambience.		
	LCF6: Trang's local food embodies traditional ways of life and eating cultures.		
Destination image (DI)			
Cognitive image	DI1: Trang is a unique place for food tourism.	6	Baloglu & McCleary (1999)
	DI2: A variety of regional foods		
	DI3: The local food activities in Trang is fascinating.		
	DI4: Reasonable prices for local products, food and other tourism-related charges.		
	DI5: To be comfortable and at ease while travelling to Trang for local food testing.		
	DI6: Travel in safe and secure surroundings in Trang.		
Global image	DI7: When it comes to food tourism, Trang is the first place that comes to mind.	4	
	DI8: You believe that Trang is an ideal destination for food tourism to gain valuable experience.		
	DI9: You believe that Trang is a food tourism destination that will meet your needs and expectations.		
	DI10: Trang is a food tourism destination where visitors can unwind and relax.		

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Statement	Number of items	Source
Affective image	DI11: Trang's position as a food tourist destination tends to add to your excitement.	4	
	DI12: You have a strong preference for Trang's indigenous gastronomy.		
	DI13: You take pride in bringing back regional delicacies as souvenirs.		
	DI14: Traveling to Trang is worthwhile.		
Tourist experience (TE)			
Education	TE1: Your experiences with food tourism in Trang have provided you with a wealth of knowledge.	4	Thayarnsin (2020) Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007)
	TE2: Food tourism in Trang teaches you a lot.		
	TE3: Food tourism is a form of education in Trang.		
	TE4: Food tourism in Trang encourages you to expand your knowledge.		
Entertainment	TE5: You take great pleasure in visiting Trang for food tourism.	4	
	TE6: You have a good time in Trang participating in food-related activities.		
	TE7: Food tourism is enjoyable in Trang.		
	TE8: You are cordially invited to participate in Trang's food activities.		
Esthetics	TE9: You believe that Trang is a worthwhile province for food tourism.	4	
	TE10: You believe Trang's surroundings are attractive.		
	TE11: The friendliness of the locals in Trang.		
	TE12: Trang is dubbed the "city of smiles."		
Escapism	TE13: Traveling via Trang enables you to escape reality.	4	
	TE14: Traveling via Trang gives you the impression of being in another world.		
	TE15: While travelling in Trang, you lose track of time.		
	TE16: Traveling to Trang exposes you to new experiences and perspectives.		

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Statement	Number of items	Source
<b>Destination loyalty (DL)</b>			
Revisit	DL1: You intend to visit Trang in the not-too-distant future.	4	Pizam, Shapoval, and Ellis (2016) Chi & Qu (2008) Chen & Tsai (2007) Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez(2001)
	DL2: Trang is most likely on your upcoming trip.		
	DL3: You intend to visit Trang in the future with your friends, relatives, siblings, or acquaintances.		
	DL4: You wish to travel frequently in Trang.		
Word-of-mouth	DL5: You are impressed and eager to share positive things about Trang with others.	3	
	DL6: You will refer Trang to those in need of your advisors.		
	DL7: You will recommend Trang as a destination for food tourism to others.		

Note: Adapted from Thayarnsin (2020); Zhang, Chen & Hu (2019); Özdemir & Seyito (2017); Youn & Kim (2017); Chi & Qu (2008); Chen & Tsai (2007); Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007); Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez (2001); Baloglu & McCleary (1999)

### The Study's Data Collection and Participants

This study aims to investigate the possibilities of local food in Trang province in terms of local food authentication, destination image as gastronomy tourism, tourist experience, and destination loyalty through a purposive sampling survey. Thai tourists who had previously visited Trang province as well as had experience tasting local food are the target population. Printed questionnaires and trained research assistants were used to collect data for this study. A study was taken on Trang's famous beaches and night markets to ensure a high participation rate. The data was gathered between April 20 and December 20, 2021. During the data collection period, several renowned beaches, including Pakmeng and Hadyao, and a night market called Cinta Market, were visited. Only Thai visitors who were willing to participate in the survey were given the questionnaire. In 2019, Trang welcomed 1,297,451 Thai tourists (Trang Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, 2020). There are several rules of thumb for determining sample size. For instance, Boomsma (1985) suggests a minimum sample size of 100 when applying SEM (Structural Equation Modeling). Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006) recommended a sample size between 100 and 200 for calculating the standard error of the mean. According to the same authors, the sample size should be at least five times the number of parameters. Bentler and Chou (1987) recommended a minimum of five or ten observations per parameter. The author received 479 responses, of which 459 were usable for further analysis (after eliminating outliers). As a result, this survey comprised 459 Thai tourists who met the criteria.

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was utilized for data analysis. It consists of descriptive statistics like percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) recommend that a measurement model be estimated before a structural model. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to evaluate the measurement model and guarantee data accuracy, including construct, reliability and validity tests. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) assessed the proposed model's overall fit and determined the causal variables' direct and indirect influence on the dependent variable.

## Results

### Profiles of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

The demographic data for participants are summarized. The 459 respondents included men and women, and approximately 70% were married. Monthly household income was reported to be between 15,000 and 25,001 Baht by respondents aged 20 to 61 (almost 80%). Around 78% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, and 57% were first-time visitors. The majority of responders came from neighboring provinces such as Pattalung and Nakhon Sri Thammarat. Bangkok, Songkhla, Satun, and Pattani were also represented.

### The Potential of Local Food

To answer the first objective, this part revealed the potential of local food in terms of local food authentication, destination image, tourist experience and loyalty. As demonstrated in Table 2, all measurement items utilized a Likert scale with five points, and the mean values for each construct exceeded a neutral or middle point. Tourist experience had the highest mean (TE = 4.32), followed by destination loyalty, destination image, and local food authentication, with mean values of 4.25, 4.18, and 4.01, respectively. Additionally, the findings indicate significant correlations between all constructs, ranging from 0.549 to 0.827 at the .05 level of significance.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Construct	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	LCF	DI	TE	DL
Local food authentication (LCF)	4.01	0.75	1			
Destination image (DI)	4.18	0.67	0.754*	1		
Tourist experience (TE)	4.32	0.76	0.598*	0.715*	1	
Destination loyalty (DL)	4.25	0.67	0.713*	0.549*	0.827*	1

### Assessment of the Measurement Model

Prior initiating the data analysis, the skewness and kurtosis values were calculated. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), the skewness and kurtosis values for all constructs ranged from 2 to +2. The first step created a measurement model, and the second step used maximum likelihood estimation to create a structural model. The original model of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed that these 43 items matched the data well ( $\chi^2 = 255$ ,  $df = 160$ ,  $p .001$ ,  $CFI = 0.920$ ,  $GFI = 0.950$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.090$ ). Consequently, the measurement model was utilized



for subsequent investigation. All estimated values for the composite reliability exceeded the suggested cutoff of 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). All factor loadings were statistically significant and quite high, ranging from 0.61 to 0.92. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) hypothesize that this convergence of indicators with pertinent underlying factors happens. Following this, the retrieved values for each construct's average variance (AVE) were all larger than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In general, the findings demonstrated the reliability and validity of the instruments. In this investigation, Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs ranged from 0.74 to 0.84, exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1988). As a result, it indicated that measurement items were internally consistent. In addition, construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were determined to evaluate convergent validity. The square root of the AVE values exceeded the research constructs' correlation coefficients. Thus, discriminant validity was proven in this investigation, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Finally, multicollinearity was determined for each of four constructs: authenticity of local food, tourist experience, destination image, and destination loyalty. To examine how variables are related to one another, multicollinearity was assessed using a variance inflation factor (VIF). As a result, no items had VIF values greater than 10, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity, as stated by the VIF value cut-off threshold of 10 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and & Tatham, 2006).

### Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The predicted findings using structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation provide an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1041.399$ ,  $df = 369$ ,  $GFI = .984$ ,  $NFI = .954$ ,  $CFI = .948$ ,  $AGFI = .968$ ,  $RMSEA = .073$ ). The proposed model accounts for variance to establish culinary tourist loyalty in terms of intention to return and word-of-mouth ( $R^2$  for DL in the original model = 0.605). The total effect model presented a strong connection between local food authentication and destination loyalty ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the standardized path coefficients for hypothesized model are  $LCA \rightarrow DL$  ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ),  $TE \rightarrow DL$  ( $\beta = 0.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ),  $LCA \rightarrow DI$  ( $\beta = 0.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and  $DI \rightarrow DL$  ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, the hypothesized associations were investigated, and Table 3 summarizes the empirical findings from the SEM; the data support five hypotheses involving direct effects.

The empirical results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were applied to measure the correlations hypothesized in Table 3. Except for Hypothesis 6, the evidence confirmed all hypotheses predicting direct impacts. This study examined the relationship between authenticating local foods and the tourist experience (H1) to determine whether increasing destination loyalty toward Trang as a gastronomy tourism destination increases destination loyalty (H2). The direct effect of local food authentication on tourist experience ( $t = 6.712$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as well as the direct impact of tourist experience on destination loyalty ( $t = 5.990$ ,  $p < .05$ ), both supported Hypotheses 1 and 2. Additionally, Hypothesis 3 proposed that authenticating local foods would increase Thai tourists' loyalty to the destination, or Trang in this case. The effect of local food authentication on destination loyalty supported this hypothesis ( $t = 5.107$ ,

$p < .01$ ). Additionally, this study anticipated that local food authentication in Trang province would bolster the province's image as a gastronomic tourism destination (H4), affecting Thai tourists' destination loyalty (H5). Both hypotheses were supported, with local food authentication significantly affecting both destination image ( $t = 3.814$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and loyalty ( $t = 2.833$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Finally, Hypothesis 6 stated that the greater the experience of Thai tourists, the more favorable the perception of Trang as a gastronomy tourism destination among Thai tourists. This hypothesis was not supported, as there was no evident positive influence of tourist experience on destination image ( $t = 0.689$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

#### Supplemental Analysis was Performed to Determine the Study Variables' Indirect Effect.

As demonstrated in Table 3, local food authentication had a significant and indirect effect on destination loyalty (LCF  $\rightarrow$  TE  $\rightarrow$  DL = 0.320\*\*) via the tourist experience. This finding indicated that tourist experience played a significant role as a mediator. Additionally, the findings indicate that destination image significantly mediates the association between local cuisine authenticity and destination loyalty (LCF  $\rightarrow$  DI  $\rightarrow$  DL = 0.583\*\*). In general, the proposed theoretical framework found that tourist experience and destination image played a significant mediating role.

**Table 3** Results of the structural model

Hypotheses	Structural paths	Std. Estimate	T-value	Hypothesis result
Hypothesis 1	LCF $\rightarrow$ TE	0.079	6.712**	Supported
Hypothesis 2	TE $\rightarrow$ DL	0.082	5.990*	Supported
Hypothesis 3	LCF $\rightarrow$ DL	0.072	5.107**	Supported
Hypothesis 4	LCF $\rightarrow$ DI	0.091	3.814*	Supported
Hypothesis 5	DI $\rightarrow$ DL	0.068	2.833*	Supported
Hypothesis 6	TE $\rightarrow$ DI	0.071	0.689	Not Supported
Variance explained	Indirect effect:			
$R^2$ (TE) = 0.589	$\beta_{LCF \rightarrow TE \rightarrow DL} = .320^{**}$			
$R^2$ (DI) = 0.547	$\beta_{LCF \rightarrow DI \rightarrow DL} = .583^{**}$			
$R^2$ (DL) = 0.605				

Note 1 \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

#### Discussion and Implications

This research aimed to generate a theoretical model of Thai gastronomic tourists' loyalty and to empirically test the relationships among local food authentication, tourist experience, and destination image as a gastronomy tourism in explaining their destination loyalty in terms of intention to revisit Trang province for gastronomy tourism and word-of-mouth intentions. The validity of this study was determined by collecting empirical data from 459 Thai tourists with prior travel experience in Trang province. In summary, the results of structural equation modeling supported five of the six hypotheses.

Thai tourists visiting Trang province gave the most outstanding gastronomy experience ratings. A tourist experience involves participating in specific activities in an unusual area. Thus, the tourist experience is defined by a vacation period, and a tourist does not engage in the same activities every day (Henning, 2012; Major & McLeay, 2012). The tourist experience was most influenced by entertainment, followed by education, aesthetics, and escapism. In addition, data indicate that gastronomic tourists value destination loyalty, with the majority planning to return to Trang in the near future and recommending it to family, friends, and acquaintances. Thai tourists were also concerned about the destination's image, with the most important determinants being cognitive, global, and affective images. Surprisingly, people placed the authenticity of local food as the lowest. Given that the majority of study participants were neighbors, it is possible that they would perceive the food of Trang to be unattractive. In addition to the present display of local cuisine and accompanying activities in Trang, the public and commercial sectors should develop creative strategies to attract tourists. Similarly, the majority of participant comments focused on the same presentation of local foods throughout the city and a lack of information about the food history of Trang. Therefore, Trang province should incorporate critical aspects or components into its province development programs, such as innovation and creativity, local food marketing, and food storytelling, in order to establish the province as the gastronomic tourism hub of Thailand. Gastronomic tourism has been considered a part of cultural tourist attractions (Naruetharadhol, Gebsoambut, Chanavirut, Onsa-ard, Joomwanta, Chanyuan & Ketkaew, 2020). By imparting flavours, local cuisine traditions, and customs, food and drink may create unforgettable experiences for travellers (Okumus, 2020). Culinary tourism can also attract travellers and produce tourism experiences (Robinson & Getz, 2014). The example of incorporating the concept of creativity may contribute in multiple ways to developing a tourist experience. By extending the sale period from morning to noon to all day, Trang can improve its signature dishes, such as pork grilled in a unique way. As you are aware, Trang-style grilled pork requires 10 to 14 hours of cooking time in a traditional oven, resulting in a limited amount of grilled porks for sale; therefore, travellers can only sample these grilled porks in the morning. However, using an innovative oven created by academics can shorten the grilling time of pork by three to four hours. Thus, travellers will have the opportunity to taste grilled pork throughout the day, boosting the revenue of Trang's business owners. Additionally, this has the ability to increase the earnings of Trang businesses. Adding value to the packaging design of a Trang cake by including the cake's history and a visually appealing design is the other perspective of creativity. Lastly, entrepreneurs can differentiate Trang's specialities by including a story about the mix of Thai, Chinese, and Muslim cultures on restaurant menus and walls. Tourists can learn about the region's history while enjoying local food. This is consistent with the study of Richards and Raymond (2000) stating that creative tourism is regarded as tourism that provides visitors with opportunities to develop their creative possibilities via active engagement in courses and learning experiences that are unique to the holiday destination.

The findings indicated that the local food authentication in the province of Trang positively impacted Thai tourists' experiences, influencing their intention to return and spread the word. Notably, previous research studies support the results of this study (Gupta & Sajnani, 2020; Remission & Uysal, 2011; Lego & Wood, 2003). According to their research, travelers commonly seek authentic dining experiences outside their hometowns. In this study, Thai tourists enjoyed a range of Trang's traditional cuisine, including dim sum, grilled pork, the famous Trang cake, and Chinese-style seafood dishes. According to Ryu and Jang (2006), food has long been seen as a vital part of introducing tourists to the cultures of a location or region. Additionally, a prior study determined that local cuisine represents the intangible history of a location (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011). Food tastes, lifestyles, and environmental variables determine the quality of local cuisine (Mitchell & Hall, 2006). Numerous studies have shown that food contributes to a region's identity, increasing its economic value (e.g., Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011; Haven-Tang, 2005). Similarly, local foods of Trang, which are distinct from those of other regions of the country, specialists from the community can assist travelers in learning the culture and gastronomy of the area. According to Ardabili, Rasouli, Daryani, Molaie & Sharegi (2011), travelers like exploring diverse foods and beverages. Therefore, recognizing local food in Trang positively affects tourists' experiences. Furthermore, the results indicate that satisfied travelers are more willing to return for gastronomic tourism and to suggest the destination, in this case, Trang, by word of mouth. This result supported a previous study by Cohen and Avieli (2004) and Andersson, Mossberg, and Therkelsen (2017) that demonstrated a correlation between visitor experience and consumer loyalty. These impressions may also influence how travelers perceive new destinations. Therefore, the tourist experience is a strong indicator of consumer loyalty in gastronomic tourism.

The study's second hypothesis demonstrated a positive relationship between authentic local cuisine and tourist loyalty. The results indicate that authenticity in local cuisine increases Thai tourists' destination loyalty in the Thai province of Trang. This finding is consistent with an earlier study (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Meethan, & Fields, 2015). In addition, a previous study found that local food promotes visitor retention and visits. Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis (2018). found and verified a link between consumer loyalty and authentic, local food. According to this research, the genuineness of the local cuisine draws Thai visitors back to the Trang region. However, the majority of Trang's tourists in the past were first-timers who were reluctant to come back for culinary tourism due to their comments about "the lifeless destination." Even though Trang has the potential to be rich in natural resources, such as magnificent beaches, an emerald cave that forms naturally, and unique local cuisine, some people are unwilling to visit there. Therefore, the destination or province of Trang must promote the originality and distinctiveness of regional cuisine in order to draw both repeat visitors and new ones.

In addition, this study revealed that authentic local ethnic cuisine had a significant impact on the destination's image, thereby increasing tourist loyalty among Thai tourists to Trang for gastronomic tourism. According to Kim, Kim, and Goh (2011), eating local cuisine helps shape the perception of a location. Additionally, the destination's image may stimulate the intention

to visit and the intention to engage in post-behavioral action (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Moreover, previous research supports the assumption that culinary tourism is linked to destination image and visitor loyalty (e.g., Chiu, Zeng, & Cheng, 2016; Oliver, 1999; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). This study established the relationship between local culinary authenticity and image as a gastronomic tourism destination, which significantly impacted tourist loyalty.

Finally, recent research showed that the experiences of Thai tourists appeared to have no positive impact on the destination's image. Discovering and tasting local cuisine and learning about local traditions were indicators of constructing tourism experiences that increased a destination's image (e.g., Björk, Kauppinen-Räsänen & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Jalis, Che, & Markwell, 2014). Additionally, another study found that brand image affected the experiences of Indonesian Facebook users (Yulianti & Tung, 2013). In consequence, the conclusions of this study contradict those of past research. According to this study, Thai tourists who experience Trang's local food cannot improve the destination's image. It is crucial to comprehend how to retain and grow gastronomic visitor loyalty in a market that is becoming increasingly saturated. This study's findings may help in the integration and development of culinary tourism, hence enhancing the competitiveness of destinations. This section examined the theoretical and practical consequences of the study for the culinary tourist business. The study's conclusions have significance for gastronomy tourism stakeholders.

This study successfully integrates local food authentication, tourist experience, and destination image. This study's findings may help academics and researchers enhance a region's image as a gastronomic tourism destination and boost tourist loyalty regarding return intentions and word of mouth. Moreover, most participants value the utilization of local ingredients, regional cooking techniques, and the distinct flavor profiles of local foods. According to the study's conclusions, stakeholders such as local food restaurants, the government, and the private sector can adapt methods to promote the authenticity of local foods, assuring the long-term viability of Trang's gastronomy tourism. Yurtseven and Karakas (2013) believe that genuine local culinary tourism necessitates local links between production and consumption. According to Pratt (2007), the connection between producers and customers is also driven by a local interest. Therefore, increasing the value of a location's authenticity, particularly regional cuisine authenticity, can help sustainable tourist growth (e.g., Barrera & Alvarado, 2008; Handszuh, 2000). In conclusion, the authenticity of local foods can contribute to the sustainability of gastronomy tourism in various ways, such as by stimulating local food production, empowering communities, instilling pride in regional foods, increasing tourism attractiveness, and establishing destination brand identity through food experiences. Furthermore, combining traditional cuisine with readily available basics can improve economic activity, according to Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen (2017). As a result, the mean of all variables was highest for the visitor experience expressed in local dishes. People travel to other locations to escape the real world while gaining experience and learning the 'authenticity' of the local culture, as mentioned by Yamashita (2015). Due to

the fact that cuisines differ, as shown in the culture of each location, they create an unforgettable memory (Okumus & McKercher, 2007), the importance of food tourism in destination marketing (Du Rand & Heath, 2006) to enhance the tourism experience and encourage visitors to extend their stays and return, stakeholders, should provide specific tourist activities that set them apart from other places. Additionally, creative tourism can increase local employment and income. According to Du Rand, Heath and Alberts (2003), cuisine adds to tourism's economic vitality and long-term sustainability.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study integrated the concepts of authentic local food, tourist experience, and destination image into a model of gastronomic tourist loyalty. The limitations of this research study should be considered in future research. The sample for this study consisted of Thai tourists from various provinces throughout Thailand. Future research should focus on both Thai and foreign gastronomy tourists to produce and increase tourism revenue for the province to gain a deeper knowledge of tourist loyalty and promote Trang as the center of gastronomy in the southern portion of Thailand. Additionally, a qualitative approach should be incorporated into the future study to include a broader range of gastronomy tourism perspectives from stakeholders such as restaurant owners, local food souvenir owners, governmental sectors, local people, tourists, and other private sectors. Besides that, since the proposed model in this study was not designed to incorporate additional significant factors or variables affecting gastronomy tourist loyalty, future research should incorporate additional significant variables into the conceptual model to provide additional information about gastronomy tourism. Finally, while these additional variables effectively explained the total variance in gastronomy tourism loyalty, it is necessary to identify additional constructs pivotal in a gastronomy tourism context in the COVID-19 era. For instance, Rahman, Gazi, Bhuiyan, and Rahaman (2021) and Thayarnsin, Laohaviraphap, and Wetchasart (2021) confirmed that travelers' perceptions of risk play a significant role in determining where they choose to travel while the COVID-19 outbreak is still a concern, specifically the effect of risk on street food repurchase intention during this era. Moreover, the recent study of Thayarnsin indicated the impact of risk on destination loyalty (Thayarnsin, 2021). As a result, incorporating this construct into the proposed model will bolster the theoretical framework, providing more comprehensive explanations for loyalty formation.

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