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## Examining the Role of Culinary Tourism in Destination Image

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### ABSTRACT

The research explores the relationship between culinary tourism, destination image perception, and tourist motivation in three regions: Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala. Delhi's culinary landscape, characterized by its multicultural heritage, offers an immersive gastronomic experience, influencing tourists' perceptions of the city as a vibrant and culturally rich destination. The study also explores how the exploration of Delhi's culinary scene motivates tourists to engage in cultural exploration. In contrast, Rajasthan's unique gastronomic traditions, such as dining in palaces and participating in cooking demonstrations, contribute to tourists' perceptions of Rajasthan as a destination steeped in history and authenticity. Kerala's coastal location and abundant natural resources provide a diverse and flavorful culinary landscape, influencing tourists' perceptions of Kerala as a destination of natural beauty, tranquillity, and culinary excellence. The study provides valuable insights for destination marketers, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers, highlighting the significance of culinary experiences in enhancing destination attractiveness, fostering cultural exchange, and driving sustainable tourism development.

**KEYWORDS:** *Culinary, Tourism, Food, Delicacies, Cuisines, Culture.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of food transcends mere sustenance and extends to shaping individuals' preferences and developing connections to travel destinations (Som et al., 2020). This phenomenon underscores the significance for both the travel and food industries to elevate their offerings beyond mere consumption into more valuable experiential realms. This notable trend, coupled with the strong interest of travellers in culinary experiences, has given rise to a distinct form of tourism known as culinary tourism. Culinary tourism, alternatively referred to as food tourism involves traveling with the primary intention of exploring and experiencing local cuisine (Kaur & Johar, 2010).

Further, Culinary tourism holds a pivotal role in shaping the image and attractiveness of travel destinations. As articulated by the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA), this type of tourism encompasses experiences where individuals engage deeply with, appreciate, and enjoy local cuisine that embodies the unique culinary heritage and cultural essence of a place.

The increasing prominence of culinary tourism has profound implications for destination branding and perception. (Richards, 2014). It serves as a conduit for showcasing the distinctiveness of a locale, elevating its identity beyond traditional attractions. Indeed, culinary offerings serve as a medium to convey the narrative of a destination—reflecting its traditions, history, and societal fabric through the lens of food.

Countries and regions often become synonymous with signature dishes or culinary traditions (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). For instance, Italy, is renowned for its pizzas and pastas, or Japan is celebrated for its Sushi dishes. These culinary identities not only define the culinary landscape but also serve as cultural ambassadors, inviting visitors to partake in an authentic and immersive experience.

The global market for culinary tourism has witnessed significant growth, with projections indicating an expansion to approximately \$82 billion by 2023, growing at a compound annual rate of over 9% (Technavio, 2019). In the context of India, a burgeoning tourism sector is anticipated to exceed \$500 billion by 2029, further underscoring the importance of culinary tourism as a means for tourists to engage with diverse cultures through food (Long, 2018).

From an economic standpoint, culinary tourism injects vitality into the hospitality sector and broader economy. It fosters entrepreneurship and innovation within local food industries, spurring the development of farm-to-table initiatives, food festivals, and artisanal markets (Sohn & Yuan, 2013). Moreover, culinary tourism contributes to job creation and sustains traditional food practices, preserving culinary heritage for future generations.

For destination marketers, leveraging culinary assets strategically is key to crafting a compelling destination narrative (Karim & Chi, 2010). By promoting culinary diversity and authenticity, destinations can differentiate themselves in a competitive tourism landscape. Savvy travellers increasingly seek unique and immersive experiences, and culinary tourism offers a gateway to discover the essence of a place through its flavors and culinary customs.

India's diverse culinary landscape reflects a blend of flavors and cooking styles shaped by regional traditions and cultural influences. Indian cuisine, ranging from fiery curries to aromatic biryanis, has gained global popularity, especially through its vibrant street food culture in cities like Delhi, Rajasthan and Kerala. Culinary tourism significantly boosts India's tourism industry by attracting food-loving travellers who contribute to the local economy through dining experiences. To fully capitalize on this potential, addressing infrastructure, hygiene standards, and promoting lesser-known regional cuisines is essential. Leveraging digital platforms can help showcase India's culinary diversity to a wider audience of global food enthusiasts. Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala offer captivating culinary experiences that contribute significantly to India's vibrant culinary tourism landscape. In Delhi, the bustling streets of Old Delhi, particularly Chandni Chowk, beckon food enthusiasts with a tempting array of street food delights. From spicy chaat (savory snacks) and succulent kebabs to indulgent parathas and traditional sweets. In Rajasthan, the cuisine reflects the region's arid climate and royal heritage. Rajasthan's culinary offerings feature a rich use of spices in dishes like dal baati churma, gatte ki sabzi, and laal maas (spicy red meat curry). These dishes, often prepared with locally sourced ingredients, offer visitors a unique taste of Rajasthani culture and tradition. On the other hand, Kerala's cuisine along the Malabar Coast showcases a delightful fusion of seafood and coconut-based dishes. Specialties include appam, seafood curries like fish moilee and prawn curry, and traditional vegetarian fare such as avial and olan. The use of aromatic spices and fresh ingredients, combined with Kerala's lush surroundings, creates an unforgettable culinary experience.

### **1.1 Activities:**

Food tourism encompasses a diverse range of activities, including dining at restaurants, purchasing food products, visiting food producers, and engaging in culinary-related experiences (Shenoy, 2005). Culinary tourism extends beyond mere consumption to encompass visits to primary and secondary food producers, participation in cooking classes, attendance at food fairs and farmer's markets, and sampling a wide range of local foods, including vegetables, fruits, and spices (Hall & Sharples, 2003). These culinary tours are typically offered in both group and private settings, catering to a variety of preferences and durations, from a few hours to a week-long immersive experience (Beer et al., 2012). Culinary tourism represents more than just a niche product; it embodies a holistic and enriching travel experience driven by cultural heritage and culinary diversity (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). By understanding the multifaceted nature of culinary tourism and its significance in shaping destination perceptions, policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and destination marketers can capitalize on culinary offerings to enhance destination attractiveness and foster sustainable tourism development.

### **1.2 Objectives of Study**

- To Explore the Impact of Culinary Tourism on Destination Image Perception
- To study how culinary of different Indian regions shape tourist perception and motivation

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

The research has considered following theoretical framework:

1. Cultural Theory: This framework explores how food reflects cultural identity and fosters cultural exchange. It emphasizes the role of regional culinary practices in shaping destination perceptions and enriching tourist experiences.
2. Experiential Theory: This theory highlights the importance of immersive and emotionally engaging experiences in tourism. Within culinary tourism research, it helps understand how diverse Indian cuisines evoke sensory responses and create memorable encounters for tourists.
3. Destination Image Theory: Analysing how tourists perceive destinations, including culinary aspects, this theory assesses how regional cuisines influence tourists' impressions of different Indian regions. It guides strategic destination marketing efforts to leverage culinary attractions.

4. Authenticity Theory: Focuses on the significance of genuine, locally sourced ingredients and traditional cooking methods in creating authentic culinary experiences. This theory aids in evaluating tourists' preferences for authenticity and its role in enhancing satisfaction and cultural immersion.
5. Motivation Theory: Investigates underlying motives driving tourist behaviours. By identifying factors like curiosity and cultural immersion, this theory helps understand why tourists engage in culinary tourism experiences. Insights from motivation theory inform tailored offerings and marketing strategies for culinary tourism.
6. Integrating these theoretical perspectives provides a structured approach to studying culinary tourism in India, offering insights into tourists' motivations, behaviours, and preferences. This knowledge supports effective destination management and promotion, enhancing the overall visitor experience and showcasing India's diverse culinary heritage.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One definition of gastronomic tourism is the practice of trying local dishes while on vacation (Long 2018). Through food, tourists are able to engage with and experience different cultures. The term "culinary tourism" is used by Germann Molz (2007) to describe vacations where the main purpose is to eat the local cuisine. Consequently, a culinary tourist is someone whose principal goal while travelling is to seek out, participate in, and engage with unique culinary experiences.

The literature review by Lertputtarak (2012) explores the relationship between destination image, food image, and revisiting behaviour in Pattaya, Thailand. It highlights the importance of destination image, which is influenced by marketing efforts, word-of-mouth recommendations, and personal experiences, in attracting tourists and fostering repeat visits. Food image, on the other hand, plays a significant role in shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination, as culinary experiences are integral to travel experiences. A positive food image can enhance destination attractiveness and contribute to overall satisfaction with the travel experience. The review provides insights into the complex interplay between these factors, which are crucial for destination marketers and policymakers to enhance destination attractiveness and encourage repeat visits.

(Shah and Dongre 2014) highlight that nearly 50% of total tourist expenses are allocated to food. When food serves as the main incentive for visiting a place, expenditures are notably higher. Additionally, culinary tourism has ripple effects as generating indirect employment opportunities, fostering agricultural promotion, and contributing to the growth of the local food processing sector. Consequently, food takes on economic significance from the perspective of the destination. Culinary tourism encompasses various facets.

The image of a region plays a pivotal role in determining whether its cuisine becomes a key attraction. (Irimiás 2011) suggests that sources of image formation encompass written materials, television, documentaries, films, endorsements, and word-of-mouth reputation. Personal experiences also contribute to shaping an image. To establish itself as a culinary hub, a region must leverage all these information sources to effectively market its cuisine, prompting desired actions. For instance, a website dedicated to a specific cuisine should not only provide details about local dishes, ingredients, recipes, and culinary traditions, but also encourage potential travellers to embark on a culinary journey to the area.

Satisfaction constitutes another significant aspect in the realm of culinary tourism, relating to the sense of well-being and contentment derived from consuming a specific product or service, such as food and its presentation. As (Tsai and Lu 2012) suggest, dining pleasure stems from both tangible and intangible factors. Tangible elements include the food's taste, variety, hygiene, and presentation; the ambiance of the dining establishment in terms of decor, atmosphere, and cleanliness; pricing; and the distinctiveness from other cuisines. Imperceptible factors are more linked to service aspects as perceptions of friendliness, consistency, efficiency, knowledge, and quality.

Culinary tourism involves challenges that can hinder tourist motivation. (Bardhi et al. 2010) Participating in food fairs and farmer's markets, taking culinary classes, sampling a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and spices, and touring primary and secondary food producers are all part of culinary tourism.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design, utilizing secondary data analysis and case study approach to investigate the influence of culinary tourism on destination image perception. A qualitative research approach is employed to delve into the nuanced aspects of destination image and culinary experiences. A comprehensive review of existing literature, academic papers, reports, and online resources related to culinary tourism and destination image perception was conducted. The study focusses on Delhi, the capital city of

India as well as Rajasthan and Kerala state, to analyse how its diverse culinary offerings influence tourists' perception and motivation. Secondary data from travel websites, blogs, and tourism reports will be analysed to understand the variety of cuisines available, the popularity of food-related activities, and the resulting impact on destination image. The secondary data collected will undergo content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends related to culinary tourism, destination image, and tourist motivations. Also, an interview was performed with 50 respondents from each state enquiring their opinions on the following variables

1. Culinary Experience Satisfaction (CES): These variable measures the level of satisfaction a traveller had with the culinary experiences in the respective destinations.
2. Destination Image Perception (DIP): This variable assesses how the travellers perceive the overall image of the destination in terms of its culture, heritage, and uniqueness.
3. Recommendation Intention (RI): This variable examines whether the travellers would recommend the destination to others based on their culinary experiences.

**3.1 Descriptive Research Design:** This study adopts a descriptive research design, which allows for the systematic exploration and description of the influence of culinary tourism on destination image perception. This design is suitable for investigating complex phenomena such as tourists' perceptions and motivations related to culinary experiences.

**Secondary Data Analysis:** The study utilizes secondary data analysis to gather information from existing literature, academic papers, reports, and online resources related to culinary tourism and destination image perception. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and allows for the synthesis of existing knowledge.

**3.2 Case Study Approach:** A case study approach is employed to provide depth and context to the investigation. By focusing on Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala, three distinct regions known for their diverse culinary offerings, the study aims to analyse how culinary experiences influence tourists' perception and motivation. This approach allows for the exploration of real-life situations and the identification of specific factors influencing destination image.

**3.3 Qualitative Research Approach:** The study employs a qualitative research approach to delve into the nuanced aspects of destination image and culinary experiences. Qualitative methods such as interviews and content analysis are utilized to gather rich, detailed insights from participants and to identify patterns, themes, and trends related to culinary tourism and destination image perception.

**3.4 Content Analysis:** Content analysis is conducted to analyse the secondary data collected from travel websites, blogs, and tourism reports. This method helps identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends related to culinary tourism, destination image, and tourist motivations. Content analysis provides a systematic approach to data analysis, allowing for the identification of key findings and insights. **Purposeful Sampling:** Purposeful sampling is considered for selecting participants for interviews. By interviewing 50 respondents from each state, prioritize individuals directly engaged in food-related professions or with deep cultural knowledge of culinary traditions. As the study aims to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to culinary tourism. **Interview Method:** Interviews are conducted with respondents from Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala to gather qualitative data on their opinions and experiences regarding culinary tourism. The focus of the interviews is on exploring three main variables: Culinary Experience Satisfaction (CES), Destination Image Perception (DIP), and Recommendation Intention (RI). The interviews are structured to elicit detailed responses from participants and to gain insights into the factors influencing their perceptions and behaviours related to culinary tourism. By employing a combination of qualitative research methods, content analysis, and purposeful sampling, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of culinary tourism on destination image perception in the selected regions of Delhi, Rajasthan and Kerala.

**Table 1: Profiles of the interviewees and interviewers**

Profile	Interviewees	Interviewers
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	Travelers from Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala	Researchers conducting the study

<b>Sample Size</b>	50 respondents from each state	Researchers conducting the interviews
<b>Selection Criteria</b>	Purposeful sampling based on travel experience and interest in culinary tourism	Trained interviewers with expertise in qualitative research methods
<b>Background</b>	Varied backgrounds including tourists, food enthusiasts, and individuals interested in cultural experiences	Experienced researchers with knowledge of culinary tourism and destination image perception
<b>Experience</b>	Diverse experiences with culinary tourism, ranging from casual travellers to food connoisseurs	Experience in conducting qualitative interviews and analysing qualitative data
<b>Role in the Study</b>	Provide insights and perspectives on culinary tourism experiences and destination image perception	Facilitate interviews, ask probing questions, and ensure data quality
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	In-person or virtual interviews, audio-recorded for transcription	Conduct interviews using semi-structured interview guides
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts to identify themes and patterns	Thematic analysis to uncover key insights and findings

*Sources : Authors' input*

**Table 2: Themes/Codes identified from the interviews and case studies**

<b>Themes/Codes</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Culinary Diversity</b>	The variety of cuisines available in Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala, reflecting regional flavours.
<b>Cultural Experience</b>	Culinary experiences as a gateway to understanding local culture, heritage, and traditions.
<b>Food Quality</b>	Perception of the quality and authenticity of local dishes, including taste, freshness, and presentation.
<b>Destination Image Perception (DIP)</b>	Impact of culinary offerings on tourists' overall perception and appeal of the destination.
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	Levels of satisfaction with culinary experiences, service quality, and value for money.
<b>Recommendation Intent (RI)</b>	Likelihood of recommending the destination to others based on culinary experiences.
<b>Authenticity</b>	Perception of the authenticity and originality of local cuisines and culinary experiences.
<b>Culinary Experiences satisfaction (CES)</b>	Engaging in food-related activities such as street food tours, cooking classes, and food festivals.

*Sources : Authors' input*

This table provides a structured overview of the main themes and codes derived from the interviews and case studies related to culinary tourism in Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

##### 4.1 Case Study 1: Delhi (Kaushal, V., & Yadav, R. 2021).

Culinary tourism has evolved into a captivating facet of travel, inviting individuals to embark on a cultural and gastronomic journey through the flavours and heritage of a destination. In the context of Delhi, a city renowned for its diverse and aromatic cuisine, this case study delves into the experiences of customers engaging in food tours. By examining insights from a variety of sources including industry experts, customer feedback, and existing literature, this study aims to unveil the underlying themes that shape tourists' perceptions and contentment while partaking in culinary tourism in Delhi. One of the resounding themes that resonates from customer experiences is the authenticity and aromatic allure of Delhi's cuisine. From street food to traditional dishes, tourists have lauded the genuine and enticing flavours that the city offers. The notion that "food is not just eating energy, it's an experience" truly encapsulates the essence of Delhi's culinary landscape. Quality and freshness emerged as pivotal components, with customers advocating for top-tier

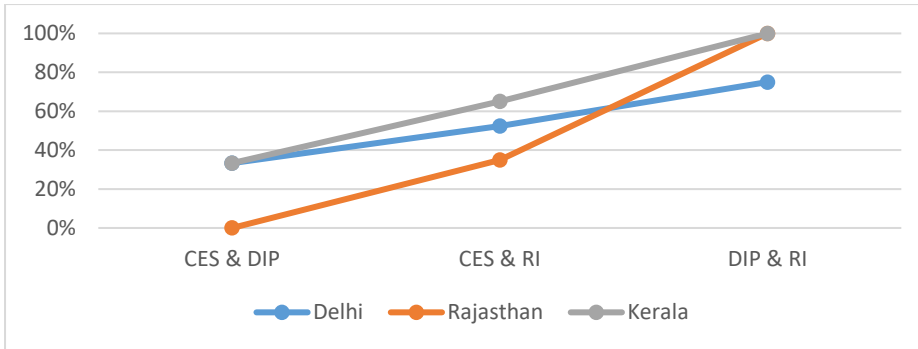
ingredients and the assurance of well-prepared and appetizing meals. This emphasis on quality reflects the commitment of food tours in ensuring a true representation of Delhi's gastronomic excellence. Central to the success of culinary tourism is its ability to establish a cultural connection. Customers commend the opportunity to delve into local culture and history through their food experiences. Authenticity in local food fosters a genuine link to the city's heritage, transcending mere consumption to encompass a holistic exploration of tradition and story. Moreover, the variation in the food menu proved to be a highlight, offering customers a kaleidoscope of textures, aromas, and spices that reflect the city's vibrant food scene. The quantity of food served during these tours also emerged as a critical factor, with tourists valuing the opportunity to indulge in generous portions. The essence of satisfaction was tied to the fulfilment derived from ample quantities of diverse and delectable dishes. Hygiene and cleanliness likewise played an indispensable role, assuring tourists of a safe and enjoyable culinary journey. The commitment of tour operators to maintain stringent hygiene standards contributed to the overall positive experience. Tour guides were pivotal in shaping tourists' encounters with Delhi's culinary delights. Guides who excelled in storytelling and shared insightful information about ingredients, spices, and historical context enriched the cultural immersion aspect of the food tour. Additionally, factors such as infrastructure quality, convenient modes of travel, and a positive digital presence on platforms like TripAdvisor contributed to the overall success of the culinary tourism experience.

#### **4.2 Case Study 2: Rajasthan (Sengupta, A. 2022)**

Rajasthan has the potential to establish itself as a prominent hub for culinary tourism, complementing its heritage tourism. In the pursuit of enhancing their cultural experiences, tourists visiting destinations steeped in heritage often seek to delve into the local culinary scene. A true Rajasthani classic, Dal Baati Churma is a combination of flavours and textures. This dish provides a wholesome insight into the state's rustic culinary traditions. Gatte ki Sabzi is a delectable curry made from gram flour dumplings cooked in a tangy yogurt-based gravy. Gatte ki Sabzi embodies the intricate flavours of Rajasthan's cuisine and offers a unique taste of the region. Laal Maas, is a fiery and indulgent dish that showcases Rajasthan's love for bold flavours. Laal Maas reflects the state's penchant for intense tastes and aromatic spices. Rajasthan's culinary scene offers a gateway to the heart of the state's heritage. Several establishments have recognized the potential of culinary tourism and have tailored their offerings to cater to this growing trend Chokhi Dhani, a restaurant set in rural Rajasthan, provides an authentic Rajasthani thali experience. With its traditional serving and dining methods. Resorts like Apno Rajasthan and Amer Vatika offer more than just accommodation; they provide a royal stay experience coupled with authentic culinary offerings. These establishments enable visitors to not only savour the flavours but also indulge in the ambiance of Rajasthan's cultural heritage.

#### **4.3 Case Study 3: Kerala (MK, M. A. 2020)**

Kerala's culinary tradition is deeply rooted in its geography, history, and cultural diversity. With its vast coastline and fertile land, the state boasts a variety of ingredients, resulting in a vibrant array of dishes that capture the essence of the region. From aromatic spices to coconut-infused curries, Kerala's cuisine is known for its harmonious blend of flavors and textures. Kerala's cuisine is characterized by its use of fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Seafood, coconut, rice, and an array of tropical fruits and vegetables form the foundation of many dishes. The proximity to the Arabian Sea ensures that seafood is a staple in Kerala's diet, and dishes like Meen Curry (fish curry) are beloved by both locals and tourists. Kerala's historic spice trade has left an indelible mark on its cuisine. Aromatic spices such as cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon, and cloves are used liberally in various dishes. The intricate balance of spices creates a symphony of flavours that sets Kerala's cuisine apart.



Sources : Author's input

**Fig 1: Interview Results**

**Table 3: Correlational Table of variables**

State	CES & DIP	CES & RI	DIP & RI
Delhi	0.625	0.866	0.866
Rajasthan	-0.625	-0.2887	0.2887
Kerala	0.625	0.5	0

Sources : Authors' input

In Delhi: There is a reasonable +ve correlation between CES & DIP (0.625), suggesting that higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is associated with a more positive perception of the destination image. There is a strong positive correlation between CES and RI (0.866), indicating that higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is strongly linked to a higher likelihood of recommending Delhi as a culinary destination. There is also a strong positive correlation between DIP and RI (0.866), suggesting that a more positive perception of the destination image is linked with a higher likelihood of recommendation.

In Rajasthan: There is a moderate -ve correlation between CES & DIP (-0.625), signifying that as satisfaction with culinary experiences decreases, the perception of the destination image becomes more negative. There is a weak negative correlation between CES and RI (-0.2887), suggesting that satisfaction with culinary experiences has a limited impact on recommendation intention. There is also a weak positive correlation between DIP and RI (0.2887), indicating that a more positive perception of the destination image is weakly associated with a higher likelihood of recommendation.

In Kerala: There is a moderate positive correlation between CES and DIP (0.625), suggesting that higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is associated with a more positive perception of the destination image. There is a modest constructive correlation between CES and RI (0.5), indicating that higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is moderately linked to a higher likelihood of recommending Kerala as a culinary destination. There is no correlation between DIP and RI (0), implying that the perception of the destination image does not impact recommendation intention in Kerala.

**5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The study embarked on a journey to uncover the intricate relationship between culinary tourism, destination image perception, and tourist motivation. We have learned a lot about how food experiences shape tourists' perspectives and motivations by using a mixed-methods approach that includes case studies of Delhi, Rajasthan, and Kerala as well as secondary data analysis. Through an extensive review of existing literature and secondary data sources, this research confirmed that culinary tourism serves as a pivotal factor in crafting destination image. The case studies of Delhi, Rajasthan and Kerala illuminated the varied impact of regional cuisines on destination image and tourist motivations. Delhi's diverse culinary landscape emerged as a testament to its multicultural fabric, influencing tourists' perceptions and inspiring them to explore the city's rich history through its gastronomy. Similarly, the unique gastronomical trilogy of Rajasthan and Kerala, with its traditional dishes and culture, was shown to intricately shape the perception of the state and motivate tourists to engage in authentic cultural experiences. In Delhi, higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is positively associated with a more positive destination image perception and a strong likelihood of recommending it as a culinary destination. In Rajasthan, lower satisfaction with culinary experiences is linked to a less favourable destination image perception, but the impact on recommendation intention is limited. In



Kerala, higher satisfaction with culinary experiences is positively associated with a more positive destination image perception and a moderate likelihood of recommending it as a culinary destination.

This study contributes to the evolving understanding of how culinary tourism intertwines with destination image and tourist behaviour. The findings underscore the importance of strategically leveraging culinary experiences to enhance a destination's appeal and foster sustainable tourism growth. By embracing the potential of culinary tourism, destinations can create unique narratives that resonate with the modern traveller's quest for authentic and immersive encounters.

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