

DOMESTIC TOURISTS' LOCAL CUISINE SELECTION BEHAVIOR IN CAN THO CITY

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the local cuisine selection behavior of domestic tourists in Can Tho City, Vietnam. Data were collected through direct surveys with 150 domestic tourists and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify tourists' food choice patterns and their level of interest in key attributes of local cuisine. The findings reveal that domestic tourists show a strong preference for local specialties and actively engage in culinary experiences at different times of the day. Among the attributes examined, food taste, dish variety, and reasonable pricing were identified as the most highly valued factors influencing cuisine selection. The study provides practical implications for the development of culinary tourism and contributes to enhancing the attractiveness of Can Tho City as a tourism destination.

Keywords: local cuisine, domestic tourists; culinary tourism.

1. Introduction

In recent years, food has become an increasingly important component of the tourism experience. For many tourists, enjoying local cuisine not only satisfies their dining needs but also provides an opportunity to explore the culture, lifestyle, and identity of a destination. As a result, culinary tourism has attracted growing attention from many localities as a means of developing distinctive tourism products and enhancing destination attractiveness.

Can Tho City, the tourism center of the Mekong Delta region, is well known for its diverse culinary offerings that reflect the unique characteristics of the river-based culture. In 2025, the city welcomed more than 11 million visitors and generated nearly VND 10 trillion in tourism revenue. Along with the growth of the tourism sector, tourists' demand for culinary

experiences has also increased significantly. However, the development of culinary tourism in Can Tho still relies largely on its existing advantages, while information on tourists' food selection and consumption behavior remains relatively limited.

Against this backdrop, this study was conducted to analyze the local cuisine selection behavior of domestic tourists in Can Tho City. The findings provide a practical basis for proposing policy implications aimed at developing culinary tourism and enhancing the attractiveness of the destination in the coming years.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Theoretical background

Consumer behavior is defined as the process through which individuals search for, select, purchase, use, and evaluate products or services to

satisfy their needs (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). In the tourism context, consumer behavior extends beyond the selection of tourism services to include decisions related to dining, accommodation, shopping, and destination experiences. Among these, local cuisine selection behavior refers to the process by which tourists seek information, choose food items and dining venues, and evaluate the attributes of local cuisine throughout their trips. According to Ellis et al. (2018), culinary tourism is not merely associated with food consumption but also involves the exploration of local culture, history, and community identity through culinary products. Consequently, for many tourists, enjoying local specialties has become an integral part of the travel experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that experiences are formed through interactions between consumers and products or services. In the context of culinary tourism, the experience is shaped not only by food taste but also by dining environments, service quality, cultural atmosphere, and the emotions generated during the consumption process (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Previous studies suggest that tourists' food selection behavior can be reflected through the types of dishes chosen, dining locations, participation in culinary activities, expenditure levels, and the importance attached to various attributes of local cuisine (Kim et al., 2009; Ellis et al., 2018; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Hoang et al., 2024). Based on these perspectives, this study examines the local cuisine selection behavior of domestic tourists in Can Tho City through five dimensions: types of dishes selected, dining locations, dining occasions, food expenditure, and tourists' evaluations of local cuisine attributes.

2.2. Research methodology

This study employed primary data collected through direct surveys of 150 domestic tourists in Can Tho City. Respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method. The survey focused on local cuisine selection behavior, including types of dishes selected, dining locations, dining occasions,

expenditure levels, and attributes of local cuisine. The measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including percentage distributions and mean values, to identify trends in the local food selection behavior of domestic tourists in Can Tho City.

3. Research results

3.1. Characteristics of the survey sample

The survey results from 150 tourists visiting Can Tho City indicate that the sample was relatively diverse in terms of gender, age, place of residence, and travel purpose. Regarding gender, female respondents accounted for 54.7% of the sample, while males represented 45.3%. In terms of age, the 26-35 age group constituted the largest proportion at 32.0%, followed by the 18-25 age group at 28.0%. The age groups of 36-45, 46-55, and over 55 years old accounted for 20.0%, 12.0%, and 8.0%, respectively.

With respect to place of residence, tourists from Ho Chi Minh City and the Southeast region accounted for the highest proportion at 43.3%, followed by those from the Mekong Delta at 26.7%, while tourists from other regions represented 30.0% of the sample. Regarding travel purpose, the majority of tourists visited Can Tho for sightseeing and leisure purposes (63.3%), followed by those combining business and tourism activities (23.3%), whereas tourists visiting friends and relatives accounted for 13.4%.

3.2. Tourists' local cuisine selection behavior

3.2.1. Characteristics of tourists' local cuisine selection behavior

The survey results indicate that local specialties were the most preferred food choice among tourists visiting Can Tho, accounting for 46.0% of all respondents. Traditional Mekong Delta dishes and seafood followed, representing 24.7% and 16.0%, respectively, while other food categories accounted for smaller proportions. This trend suggests that the desire to explore local culture through cuisine has become increasingly evident in tourism activities. Dishes such as lau mam (fermented fish hotpot), banh xeo (Vietnamese savory pancake), bun ca (fish

noodle soup), and various traditional cakes not only offer culinary value but also reflect the distinctive cultural identity of the Mekong Delta region.

Regarding dining occasions, 58.0% of respondents reported enjoying local cuisine during all three main meals of the day, while 24.0% focused primarily on dinner. The proportions of tourists choosing only breakfast or lunch were relatively low. These findings suggest that food has become an important component of the travel itinerary rather than merely satisfying basic dining needs. The development of floating markets, night markets, and specialized food areas has provided visitors with greater opportunities to engage in diverse culinary experiences throughout their stay.

With respect to dining locations, local eateries were the most popular choice, accounting for 40.7% of responses, followed by night markets and food courts (21.3%), restaurants (18.7%), and floating markets (12.0%). This pattern indicates that tourists tend to seek venues that are closely connected to local daily life. The authenticity of the dining experience appears to be one of the key factors contributing to the appeal of culinary tourism in Can Tho.

In terms of food expenditure, the largest group of respondents (44.7%) spent between VND 200,000 and under VND 400,000 per person per day, followed by those spending between VND 400,000 and under VND 600,000 (26.7%). This expenditure pattern suggests that local cuisine in Can Tho is generally perceived as affordable and accessible to most visitors. Such affordability represents a competitive advantage, while also indicating opportunities to increase tourist spending through the integration of culinary activities with cultural, entertainment, and other complementary tourism experiences.

3.2.2. Tourists' evaluation of local cuisine attributes

The survey results indicate that tourists highly value various attributes of local cuisine when visiting Can Tho City. Among these attributes, food taste received the highest mean score (4.28), indicating a very high level of agreement. This finding suggests

that the appeal of Can Tho's cuisine is primarily rooted in the quality and distinctive flavors of its dishes. Well-known specialties such as lau mam, banh xeo, and bun ca not only impress visitors through their preparation methods but also reflect the unique culinary identity of the Mekong Delta.

The diversity of dishes achieved a mean score of 4.02, while service attitude and reasonable pricing received scores of 3.92 and 3.89, respectively, all of which were rated at a high level. These results indicate that tourists pay attention not only to food quality but also to the overall value obtained from their culinary experiences. With abundant local ingredients and a wide range of dishes, from everyday foods to regional specialties, Can Tho's culinary offerings are able to satisfy the preferences of different visitor segments.

The attribute reflecting cultural identity obtained a mean score of 3.76 and was also evaluated positively. This suggests that tourists are still able to perceive the distinctive characteristics of the region's river-based culture through local ingredients, cooking methods, and service styles. However, the moderate score implies that many food establishments have yet to fully incorporate cultural elements into the design of their products and visitor experiences.

Dining atmosphere and presentation received a mean score of 3.37, representing a moderate level of evaluation. This result reflects the fact that most culinary businesses in Can Tho continue to operate through traditional eateries and small-scale establishments. While their simplicity and authenticity contribute to the destination's unique character, the growing demand for more diverse tourism experiences requires a better balance between local identity and the quality of dining environments.

Information obtained from social media and online reviews recorded the lowest mean score among the surveyed attributes, at 3.31. This finding suggests that the promotion and dissemination of Can Tho's culinary image through digital platforms have not yet been fully leveraged. As tourists increasingly rely on online information before traveling, improving digital communication and online

marketing activities could enhance both the visibility and attractiveness of the city's culinary tourism offerings.

4. Policy implications

The findings indicate that food taste is the attribute most highly valued by tourists when selecting local cuisine. Therefore, Can Tho City should prioritize the preservation and promotion of culinary specialties closely associated with the region's riverine culture, such as lau mam, banh xeo, bun ca, banh tet la cam, and various Southern traditional cakes. Local food businesses should be encouraged to incorporate stories about the origins, cultural significance, and preparation processes of these dishes in order to enrich visitors' culinary experiences and enhance the perceived value of local cuisine.

The high evaluations of food diversity and reasonable prices suggest that these attributes constitute important competitive advantages of Can Tho's culinary tourism. Accordingly, the city should develop and promote themed culinary routes, such as "Cai Rang Floating Market Culinary Experience," "Ninh Kieu Night Food Tour," and "Southern Traditional Cake Journey." These culinary products should be integrated with ecological attractions, traditional craft villages, and local cultural activities to extend tourists' length of stay and increase visitor expenditure.

The survey results also reveal that dining atmosphere has yet to leave a strong impression on visitors. Greater attention should therefore be given to upgrading food courts, night markets, and tourism-oriented dining areas by improving hygiene standards, food safety, convenience, and the incorporation of local cultural elements. Integrating culinary activities with Don Ca Tai Tu performances, demonstrations of traditional occupations, and hands-

on cooking experiences may further enhance the overall tourism experience.

In addition, the relatively modest influence of social media and online information suggests that the promotion of Can Tho's culinary image remains fragmented and insufficiently coordinated. The city should develop a digital culinary map, establish online platforms introducing local specialties, strengthen promotional activities on TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, and collaborate with key opinion leaders and travel bloggers to increase the visibility of local cuisine. Such initiatives are expected to improve tourists' access to information, particularly among younger travelers who increasingly rely on digital sources when planning their trips.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the local cuisine selection behavior of tourists visiting Can Tho City. The findings reveal that tourists tend to prioritize local specialties, prefer traditional eateries as dining venues, and allocate a reasonable proportion of their travel budget to culinary activities. Food taste, diversity of dishes, and cultural values associated with local cuisine emerged as the most highly valued attributes. These findings suggest that cuisine has evolved beyond a supporting tourism service and has become an integral component of the tourism experience in Can Tho. The study provides practical insights for the development of culinary tourism products and offers useful implications for destination managers and tourism businesses seeking to enhance the attractiveness of the city. Given the limited scope of the survey, future studies may consider expanding the sample size and research subjects to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' culinary consumption behavior ■

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HÀNH VI LỰA CHỌN ẨM THỰC ĐỊA PHƯƠNG CỦA KHÁCH DU LỊCH NỘI ĐỊA TẠI THÀNH PHỐ CẦN THƠ

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TÓM TẮT:

Nghiên cứu này phân tích hành vi lựa chọn ẩm thực địa phương của khách du lịch nội địa tại TP.Cần Thơ, Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua khảo sát trực tiếp với 150 khách du lịch nội địa và được phân tích bằng các phương pháp thống kê mô tả nhằm xác định xu hướng lựa chọn món ăn của du khách cũng như mức độ quan tâm của họ đối với các thuộc tính quan trọng của ẩm thực địa phương. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy khách du lịch nội địa có xu hướng ưu tiên các đặc sản địa phương và tích cực tham gia trải nghiệm ẩm thực vào nhiều thời điểm khác nhau trong ngày. Trong số các thuộc tính được xem xét, hương vị món ăn, sự đa dạng của món ăn và mức giá hợp lý được xác định là những yếu tố được đánh giá cao nhất, có ảnh hưởng đáng kể đến việc lựa chọn ẩm thực. Dựa trên những kết quả này, nghiên cứu đã đưa ra những hàm ý thực tiễn cho việc phát triển du lịch ẩm thực và góp phần nâng cao sức hấp dẫn của TP.Cần Thơ như một điểm đến du lịch.

Từ khóa: ẩm thực địa phương, khách du lịch nội địa; du lịch ẩm thực.