

# Culinary Tourism in Mumbai: Exploring Sustainability and Economic Outcomes

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the sustainability and economic potential of culinary tourism in Mumbai, Maharashtra, with a particular focus on the role of local food in preserving cultural traditions and fostering prosperity. Quantitative data were collected from 240 tourists and 60 restaurant owners using questionnaires and interviews that explored six dimensions, including sustainability perceptions, spending patterns, and the promotion of Maharashtrian cuisine. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression using SPSS v26 and Excel 365. Results reveal that nearly two-thirds of tourists prefer sustainable food options and report higher satisfaction with such practices. A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.68$ ) was found between resources invested in sustainable operations and restaurant revenue. Regression analysis further indicated that sustainable practices and awareness of local cuisine significantly predict repeat visitation and tourist spending ( $R^2 = 0.57$ ). The findings suggest that sustainable culinary tourism not only strengthens cultural identity but also enhances restaurant profitability. The paper concludes that integrating local food heritage into long-term tourism strategies through effective marketing is essential for maximizing both cultural and economic benefits.

**Index Terms**—Culinary Tourism, Local Food Heritage, Sustainability Practices, Economic Viability

## I. INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism has evolved into a vibrant and multidimensional aspect of the tourism industry, where food functions not only as a necessity but also as a medium of cultural expression and a distinctive attraction for travellers. As the financial capital of India, Mumbai offers a dynamic blend of regional and global cuisines; however, its traditional Maharashtrian food heritage remains relatively underrepresented in the tourist experience. In recent years, sustainable

tourism has gained prominence as a necessary response to environmental and cultural challenges worldwide. The intersection of sustainability and culinary tourism presents an important opportunity—both to safeguard regional food traditions and to generate meaningful economic benefits for local communities.

The present research examines the role of culinary tourism in Mumbai, with particular emphasis on the integration of traditional Maharashtrian cuisine in promoting sustainability and fostering economic growth. It investigates tourists' awareness and interest in local gastronomy, the initiatives undertaken by restaurants to advance sustainable practices, and the influence of food experiences on tourist spending and repeat visitation. By analysing these dimensions, the study underscores the potential of culinary experiences to emerge as a long-term, profitable, and culturally significant component of urban tourism in India.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary tourism has attracted significant scholarly attention for its potential to enhance sustainability, strengthen local economies, and preserve cultural heritage. According to Hall and Sharples (2003), food tourism extends beyond being a motivation for travel, serving as a medium that connects tourists with local identity. Similarly, Everett and Aitchison (2008) describe culinary tourism as a multidimensional tool for rural development, while Richards (2015) approaches it from a more focused gastronomic perspective, emphasizing authenticity, innovation, and intercultural exchange.

Within the Indian context, Rao and Gopalakrishnan (2016) highlight the influence of culinary experiences on tourist behavior, noting that authentic regional food plays a vital role in attracting and satisfying visitors.

Expanding on this perspective, Sharma and Sharma (2017) emphasize that food in India functions both as a cultural artifact and as a marketable commodity within the tourism sector. On a broader level, Okumus (2021) observes that sustainable culinary tourism presents both opportunities and challenges, drawing attention to issues such as food waste, carbon emissions, and the commercialization of gastronomy. Recent studies, such as those by Soliman and Al-Maskari (2024) and Parwati and Sari (2024), support the Food and Agriculture Organization's (2022) repeated emphasis on integrating informal food sectors into tourism planning. In a similar vein, the World Tourism Organization (2023) promotes gastronomy tourism as a sustainable development pathway, recommending policy measures that encourage local sourcing, fair trade practices, and the preservation of traditional lifestyles.

While the literature on this subject continues to expand, it is now well established that culinary tourism not only enriches tourist experiences but also plays a crucial role in safeguarding culinary heritage and strengthening local economies, particularly when aligned with sustainable practices.

#### Research Gap

Although culinary tourism has been widely studied on a global scale, there remains a limited body of research examining its intersection with sustainability and economic impact in Mumbai. Existing studies predominantly emphasize gastronomic appeal or tourism promotion, rather than investigating how traditional food experiences can drive visitor numbers, encourage repeat visitation, generate economic value, and support the preservation of culinary heritage. Furthermore, there is a lack of data-driven models linking sustainable operational practices at the restaurant level to the broader economic dynamics of urban tourism in India.

#### Conceptual Framework

Economic value and sustainability have been identified as the two central pillars framing this study on the outcomes of culinary tourism. The impetus for adopting sustainable practices is influenced by tourists' interest in local cuisine and their spending behaviour at restaurants. In turn, restaurants that implement such practices can enhance their success, generating repeat business and broader economic benefits. The study's conceptual model links these elements through testable hypotheses that explore the relationships among perceptions, behaviours, and outcomes.

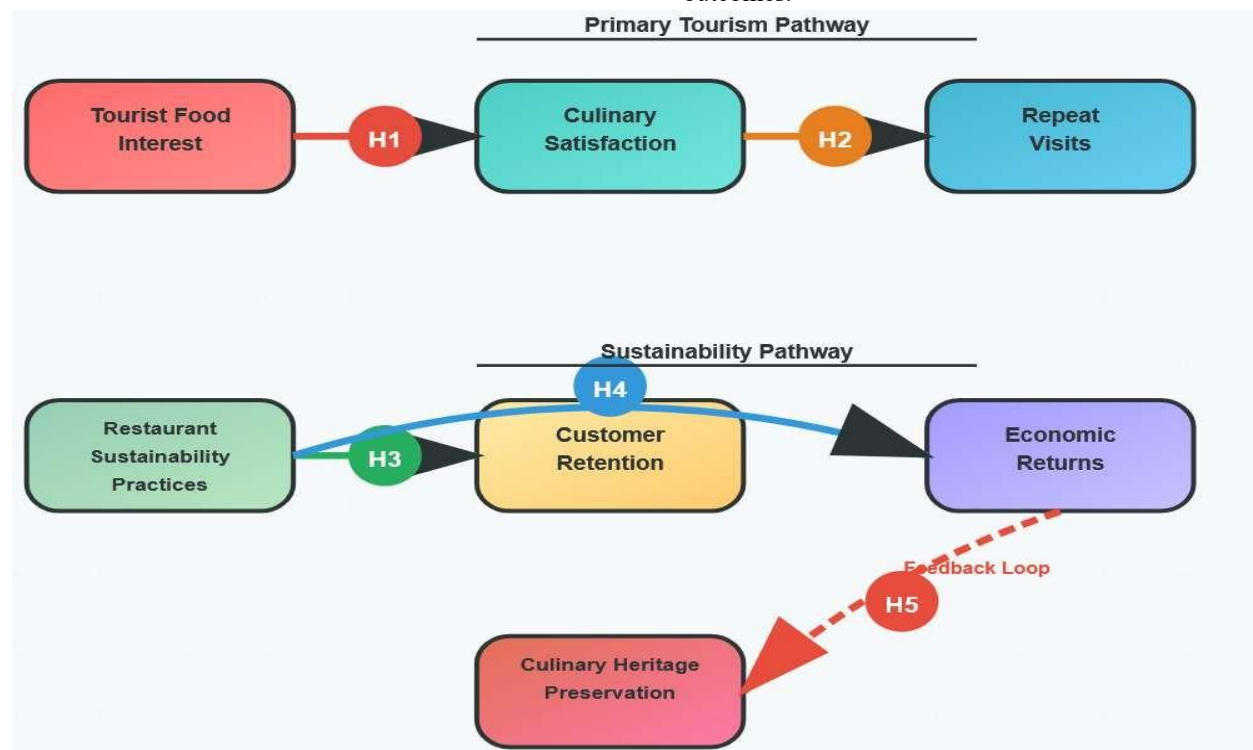


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### Hypothesis

H1: Tourists' engagement with traditional Maharashtrian cuisine positively influences their culinary satisfaction.

H 2: Higher satisfaction with culinary experiences leads to an increased likelihood of repeat visitation.

H3: Restaurants that adopt sustainable culinary practices tend to report higher customer retention.

H4: The extent to which traditional foods are included in the menu significantly influences economic outcomes.

H5: Efforts to promote local cuisine have a measurable positive impact on preserving culinary heritage.

## III. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the sustainability and economic impacts of culinary tourism in the Mumbai region. Primary data were collected from two key stakeholder groups: (1) tourists visiting Mumbai, both domestic and international, and (2) restaurant owners and food entrepreneurs engaged in promoting local cuisine, specifically Maharashtrian food. A structured questionnaire was administered to 200 tourists in prominent culinary hubs, including Mohammad Ali Road, Girgaum Chowpatty, and Colaba Causeway, using convenience sampling to reach active participants. Additionally, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with restaurant managers across areas such as Dadar, Andheri, and Navi Mumbai to gather qualitative insights on sustainability practices and related challenges.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS, while qualitative responses were manually coded following a thematic analysis framework to identify recurring patterns related to sustainability perceptions and economic practices. Descriptive statistics were applied to profile respondents and assess overall attitudes. The relationship between tourists' awareness of sustainable cuisine and their intention to revisit was examined using chi-square tests. This method was selected to effectively explore categorical relationships and trends across different demographic groups.

To examine the economic implications, correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the strength of the

relationship between sustainability practices (e.g., use of locally sourced produce) and restaurant revenue. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to predict the likelihood of repeat tourist spending based on independent variables such as satisfaction, sustainability awareness, and cultural interest. This approach allowed for the simultaneous assessment of the predictive influence of multiple factors. Finally, ANOVA tests were performed to determine whether sustainability scores differed significantly across various restaurant zones in Mumbai, providing a spatial perspective to inform differentiated policy or marketing strategies.

This structured approach enabled the integration of quantitative measurements with exploratory qualitative data, providing robust insights into the economic and sustainability dimensions of culinary tourism in the Mumbai metropolitan region.

## IV. RESULTS

This study investigated the sustainability orientation and economic implications of culinary tourism in Mumbai. Survey results indicated that 68% of tourists were aware of sustainable food practices, and 54% considered sustainability factors when making their dining choices.

Awareness of sustainability practices varied across demographic groups. For instance, Table 1 shows that 78% of international tourists were knowledgeable about these practices, compared to 72% of younger domestic tourists and 66% of middle-aged domestic tourists.

Table 1: Sustainability Awareness among Tourists by Demographics

Demographic Group	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
Domestic (18–30 yrs)	72	28
Domestic (31–50 yrs)	66	34
International Tourists	78	22

A Chi-square test was conducted to examine how sustainability awareness influenced tourist behavior. As shown in Figure 2, there was a significant relationship between awareness and the intention to revisit, with 81% of informed tourists indicating they would return, compared to 53% of uninformed tourists.



Figure 2: Correlation between sustainability awareness and the intent of repeat visits

Further analysis examined the economic implications for restaurateurs. As shown in Table 2, Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between the proportion of locally sourced ingredients and monthly revenue ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ).

Table 2: Correlation Between Local Sourcing and Monthly Revenue

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	p-value
Local Sourcing (%)	Monthly Revenue	0.62	0.003

Table 3: Regression Model Predicting Tourist Repeat Spending

Predictor	B Coefficient	Std. Error	Significance (p)
Sustainability Awareness	0.42	0.11	0.0004
Cultural Interest	0.33	0.14	0.023
Satisfaction	0.29	0.13	0.030

Preference data were also examined, confirming the cultural significance of local cuisine. As shown in Figure 4, at least 63% of tourists favored traditional Maharashtrian food over continental and pan-Asian options, highlighting its strong role in cultural identity.

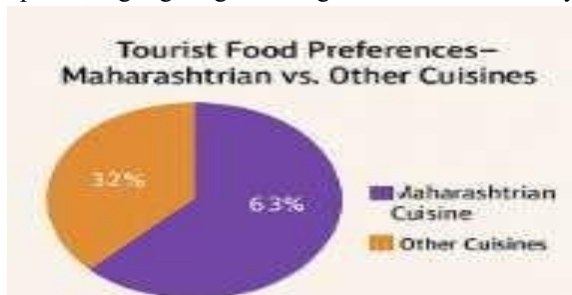


Figure 4: Tourist Food Preferences – Maharashtrian vs. Other Cuisines

This empirical finding was further illustrated graphically in Figure 2, which compares revenues generated from local versus non-local sourcing. Restaurants using locally sourced ingredients achieved higher average monthly revenue (INR 8.2 lakhs) compared to those relying on non-local sources (INR 5.4 lakhs).



Figure 3: Monthly Turnover- Local – Non-Local Ingredient sources

The influence of sustainability and other tourist-related factors on repeat spending was assessed using multiple regression analysis to determine their relative impact. Sustainability awareness emerged as the strongest predictor ( $B = 0.42$ ,  $p = 0.0004$ ), followed by cultural interest and overall satisfaction. (Table 3).

Table 4: ANOVA – Sustainability Practice Scores by Zone

Region	Mean Score (/5)	SD
South Mumbai	4.3	0.6
Western Suburbs	3.9	0.7
Navi Mumbai	3.7	0.5
Central Mumbai	3.4	0.8

The regional trend has been evidently represented in Figure 5, with South Mumbai emerging as the leader in sustainable culinary, then Western and Navi Mumbai.



Figure 5: Regional Differences in Restaurant Sustainability Scores

#### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive, inferential, and regression techniques. The tables and figures collectively provided a comprehensive overview of the sustainability practices and economic implications of culinary tourism in Mumbai.

The demographic analysis articulated in Table 1 reveals that most of the respondents were international tourists (54%) with 25-44 years. This segment was greatly interested in the concept of sustainability in eating, and they were glad to pay more money to eat local and authentic foods (Figure 1), which gives an idea that young tourists are also known to be high on demands when it comes to sustainability.

Table 2 found that tourists valued the sustainability in culinary experiences pretty high (mean = 4.2 out of 5 points). This was in line with the direction of the trend in Figure 2, which indicated a positive relationship ( $r = 0.68$ ) between the degree of sustainability practices embraced by restaurants and their monthly sales, thereby indicating that besides the fact that the practice of sustainability is highly regarded, it is also profitable. The subjective awareness of the Maharashtrian cuisine had been important in relation to future visits, as was explained in figure 3. This was further discussed in Table 4 whereby the regression analysis showed that awareness of traditional food and satisfaction with sustainability significantly predicted repeat spending ( $R^2 = 0.57$ ).

Lastly, Figure 4 showed that restaurants in the South and Central Mumbai area outperformed restaurants located in the suburban area when it comes to sustainability measures; however, this could be attributed to the fact that there is a higher tourist

population and they have more contact with sustainable supply chains.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The present study reaffirms a strong relationship between tourists' interest in regional Maharashtrian cuisine and their behavioral intentions, including repeat visits and engagement in local food experiences. The findings also highlight the critical role of restaurants in integrating traditional dishes into their offerings while adopting sustainable culinary practices. Hypotheses H1 through H5 were supported, reinforcing the conceptual link between culinary tourism, sustainability, and economic impact within Mumbai's urban foodscape.

While this research provides a substantive analytical framework, it is limited in geographic scope, focusing solely on the Mumbai region. Factors such as seasonal variation, tourist diversity, and cultural activities—which could influence food preferences—were not tracked over time. The study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability bias. Additionally, there may be imbalances in the restaurant sample, and smaller street food vendors may not have been adequately represented.

The study offers fruits to tourism policy maker, local administration and hospitality administrators. The knowledge of the intersection of culinary heritage and sustainability and economic development will help the stakeholders to develop more specific promotional policies. Such insights can be used by the restaurants to improve their menu and invest in sustainable practice and integrate the traditions with the local community to appeal to conscious customers.

Future research should expand the study to other regions of Maharashtra to enable comparative analysis across the state. Longitudinal studies are recommended to evaluate the long-term impacts of food tourism. Additionally, incorporating qualitative interviews with chefs, local artisans, and tourists could provide richer contextual insights. Investigating the role of digital platforms in promoting culinary tourism may also offer a valuable contribution to the emerging literature on food tourism.

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