

# Taste and Satisfaction: A Study of Madurai's Traditional Cuisine

N.Ramesh<sup>1</sup>, U.Vijayashankar<sup>2</sup>, and S.Bharathi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Management, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Trichy

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, School of Law, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University,, Samayapuram, Trichy

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, School of Management, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Samayapuram, Trichy

**Abstract-** This research examines the relationship between the heritage food culture and customer satisfaction in the rich backdrop of Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Tourism is now increasingly becoming globalized; therefore, travelers are looking for authentic experiences with cultural deepness. Authenticity in taste and quality becomes imperative not only for local identity but also regarding the tourism attractiveness of traditional food, Madurai, renowned for its unique dishes like Kari Dosa, Jigarthanda, and Kudal Kari, offers a fascinating environment to investigate how flavor contributes to customer satisfaction. This study looks at how heritage food enhances the dining experience and reinforces cultural identity while boosting culinary tourism. The findings reveal a strong relationship between authentic taste and customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of preserving traditional cooking methods to craft memorable culinary experiences for both locals and tourists.

**Keywords-** traditional food, customer satisfaction, taste, culinary tourism, cultural identity, Madurai

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings, by nature, remain ever curious and eager for new experiences. This desire for experience is usually manifested through travelling - a journey where one tries to involve all sensory perceptions by tasting good food, admiring colors, listening to unheard sounds, inhaling exotic scents, or touching newly different textures. A brief sensory overview is inherently interwoven with the actual enrichment of the travel experience, thus contributing to tourism, which in turn affects local economies and labor markets positively (Lin et al., 2021). For food, especially when the destination is imbued with culinary heritage, sensory engagement is also an essential experience determinant of that journey (Feldman et al., 2022). Culinary practice non-conformant with cultural norms often impinges upon the very nature of the tourist experience. Food

transcends mere sustenance, serving as a profound medium that embodies a region's historical narratives, cultural practices, and core values. Cookery is thus regarded as modern writers have stated, as the best form for cultural experience (Sánchez et al., 2021). When considering a food destination for tourists' attraction, authenticity must be assured, meaning that the dishes ought, in the true sense, to reflect the traditions, local ingredients, and methods of preparation of the region concerned (Santos et al., 2020). From the scent of a meal just off the stove to crunchiness or softness to eye appeal, food intensely heightens a travel experience. This tends to be especially true in the case of traditional food wherein the food itself takes care not only of hunger but also of emotional experience and collective memories (Yang et al., 2023). Current investigations have shown that sensory factors of food, namely, taste, smell, texture, and presentation, enhance and contribute to the satisfaction and enjoyment of the dining experience (Sims, 2020). Familiar comfort arising from traditional food serves as a memory vehicle whereby influencers affect tourists' judgments on authenticity and satisfaction (Khan et al., 2022).

The critical study of culinary authenticity has garnered increasing attention in recent years within tourism. Tourists often seek authentic culinary experiences because food is an avenue for them to engage the local culture and history (Cohen & Avieli, 2022). The taste and familiarity of traditional foods bring back memories and feelings for many travelers, thereby reinforcing the emotions of both belongingness and nostalgia (Iorio & Lipari, 2021). In this manner, food plays an important part in nutrition and cultural bonding and meaningful experiences. Madurai, by virtue of its placement in the southern part of India, is the extent of the variety that traditional cuisine can offer the local culture and

tourism industry. Famous for its dishes, such as Kari Dosa; Jigarthanda; Kola Urundai Paruthi Paal; Mutton Chukka, Madurai's food is more than just a range of well-known dishes, it offers a treasure house of taste and reflects the cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu. Various traditional dishes are important beacons for the identity of the city and draw tourists from both domestic and international locations. The major aim of this research study would analyze the scope of traditional cuisine in Madurai as an add-on to customer satisfaction. The study would discuss the elements such as authenticity, flavor, culture as part of the total dining experience and how they emphasize on the city's attraction as a culinary tourism destination. This research would try to understand the importance of maintaining traditional cooking styles and their contributions to enhancing cultural pride while also taking through the idea of economic prosperity through tourism in Madurai.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, in the broadening area of culinary tourism, traditional food has become more significant for cultural heritage and customer experiences. In the last five years, more scholars have started to look at how engagement with traditional culinary practices fosters a deeper sense of authenticity, significantly enhancing tourist satisfaction and cultural understanding. Madurai, as a community with inherent culinary traditions, is compelling for understanding the role heritage cuisine plays in customer satisfaction and destination attractiveness. Authenticity in culinary tourism literature is an unabashedly pivotal point. Contemporary tourists are drawn to experiences that uphold cultural authenticity and reinforce historical traditions. According to Sims et al. (2020), culinary experiences mean the use of traditional food recipes, indigenous food ingredients, and inherited food and food-making practices. When you visit a city like Madurai, popular dishes like Kari Dosa and Paruthi Paal represent food; these dishes represent cultural relevance. There are researchers (Santos et al. 2020) who have infused the idea of authenticity in culinary tourism literature and how tourists' perception of authenticity significantly enhance their emotional connection to a destination and boost returning visitors to the destination and oral word-of-mouth sharing. Cohen and Avieli (2022) have analysed how authenticity is constructed and apparent through food practice, especially regarding street food

practices and locals' eateries with indigenous cuisine where it continues to exist outside the frames of formal hospitality. They argued that tourists often consider food and drink as pointers of authenticity beyond taste.

Current studies have reinforced the importance of a multi-sensory experience for food satisfaction. Feldman et al. (2022) and Yang et al. (2023) identified that sensory attributes, including aroma, texture, taste, and visual appeal, are essential ingredients in understanding tourists' emotional and psychological relations. Madurai has a lot of spices, textures, and smells that contribute to sensory experiences. Tourists tend to perform a sensory journey to enhance the overall satisfaction of the diner. Khan et al. (2022) describe the sensory satisfaction of traditional foods, often both nostalgic and emotional, particularly for domestic tourists who attribute childhood memories or communal identity to traditional fare. These These connections make their dining experience more memorable and effective will be discussed further in this thesis. Heritage food is broadly regarded as representative of cultural identity and pride. Iorio and Lipari (2021) noted the narrative function of traditional foods and the role they play in the transmission and embodiment of cultural values and memories. In Madurai, foods like Jigarthanda or Kola Urundai are not only popular foods; they serve as indicators of the social and cultural transition of the region and ally themselves with Tamil identity. Sánchez et al. (2021) argued that culinary tourism serves as a vehicle for intangible heritage preservation, as food products are handed down to the next generation.

For local cuisines, food serves as a tangible symbol. An increasing number of people believe that food tourism can create economic development. Lin et al. (2021) noted that tourism incorporated the local food systems; it creates jobs, develops local farming systems and networks, aids small farmers and vendors, and generates more income for traditional cooks. This is important in the city of Madurai, where informal food networks play an important role in the hospitality ecosystem. The trend of travellers exploring food reputations to decide where to visit is also reflected in new studies done by Ahmed & Baranwal (2023). The authors discussed that there is significant evidence that travellers are now using social media and food reviews to discover authentic and under-the-radar food experiences, highlighting

how much food-based digital marketing is on the rise in tourism.

Beyond its nutritional function, food acts as an emotional anchor and a catalyst for social connectivity among individuals and communities. The emotional aspects of food tourism, as per the research by Tsai & Wang (2020), can also create emotional belonging and empathy with locals who prepare traditional food. The integration of that emotion condenses into satisfaction and overall perceptions of the destination. More apps and unfamiliar culinary experiences have been shown to create spaces for cultural exchange (Chen & Huang, 2021). In a city like Madurai

### III. METHODOLOGY

This research uses mixed methods to examine the relationship between traditional foods found in Madurai and tourist experiences and satisfaction. The study was conducted between January 2024 and August 2024 during times of high tourist visitation periods to collect rich data. The quantitative technique of research was adopted by the current study, from which structured questionnaires were administered to domestic tourists and international tourists visiting Madurai, focusing on their exposure to traditional local foods like Kari Dosa, Jigarthanda, and Muttaiparotta. This further allowed a systematic exploration of traditional food experience as well as visitation satisfaction. Respondents were selected through a purposive sampling method of tourists that had experienced Madurai's local food during visits. The sample consisted of 150 tourists aged 18-60 years, with a variety of demographic groups represented to enhance generalisation of the study. The sample demographic represented 58% male, 42% female, 47% employed, 22% unemployed, and 31% as students, while domestic and international tourists made up 78% and 22%, respectively. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that included 13 statements measured on a 1 to 7 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) and 3 demographic questions. The questionnaire items focused on key areas, which were taste, food presentation (heating/warmth), hygiene/service level, and culture engagement.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 150 respondents give significant insights into how Madurai's traditional

cuisine impacts tourist satisfaction. The findings provide a comprehensive accepting of the role that taste, presentation, hygiene, service, and cultural engagement play in determining the culinary experience of tourists. The results highlight the importance of authenticity in food, the sensory appeal of traditional dishes, and the emotional connections fostered through food-based cultural experiences.

#### 4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents, including, gender, age, occupation, and location of origin was key to ensuring a relatively diverse and representative sample. As per the data from Table 1, the survey show the mixture of domestic (78%) and international (22%) tourists. The sample was 58% male and comprised a moderate number of younger tourists with 45% represented by tourists in the 18-30 age category. The diversity in the samples responds to the breadth of perspectives that can be offered in relation to the enlivening experiences associated with dining and ensures potential applicability of the findings to different tourist types.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	58%
Female	42%
Age Group	
18-30 Years	45%
31-45 Years	33%
46-60 Years	22%
Occupation	
Employed	47%
Unemployed	22%
Students	31%
Tourist Origin	
Domestic	78%
International	22%

#### 4.2. Taste and notion of authenticity

The taste was identified as the most important factor affecting general satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents (85%) evaluated

strongly traditional kitchen, with an average score from 5.5 to 6.5. Recipes like Kari Dosa, Jigarthanda and Kudal Kari were well received to their taste, depicting the cultural wealth of Madurai. Most of the responders highlighted the local ingredients and traditional cooking techniques, which contributed various flavors of these dishes and offered a joyful experience.

Table 2: Taste Perception of Traditional Dishes

Traditional Dish	Mean Score	Rating (1-7)
Kari Dosa	6.3	High
Jigarthanda	5.9	High
Kudal Kari	6.1	High
Kola Urundai	5.8	High

#### 4.3. Food Presentation and Visual Appeal

Food presentation was also another important factor in ensuring an enhanced dining experience. As can be seen from Table 3, more than half of the responders (70%) greatly appreciated the food presentation, with mean ratings ranging from 5.5 to 6.0. The tourists embraced the visual presentation of meals, especially the vibrant garnishes and the traditional method of presenting the dishes. The visual aspects helped make the overall cultural experience more satisfying, making their perceptions of authenticity stronger and enhancing the evening meal experience.

Table 3: Food Presentation and Eye Appeal

Factor	Mean Score	Rating (1-7)
Visual Attractiveness of Dishes	5.6	High
Garnishes and Serving Style	5.5	High

Food presentation plays an important role in making a strong first impression. The manner in which food is served significantly contributes to tourists' expectations and enjoyment. Conventional ways of serving food, particularly in street restaurants and food stalls, help maintain the cultural significance and authenticity of the dishes.

#### 4.4. Hygiene and Service Quality

Even though the prime importance of this research was on food, hygiene and service quality also played a role in overall satisfaction. Table 4 shows that the majority of responders were satisfied with hygiene

standards and service quality in the majority of food outlets. The considerable majority (78%) felt hygiene and service were satisfactory or excellent. But some responders mentioned that street food premises occasionally showed unconventional hygiene practices, which indicate grounds for improvement in these, particularly among food stalls and street vendors.

Table 4: Perception of Hygiene and Service Quality

Factor	Mean Score	Rating (1-7)
Hygiene in Food Stalls	5.4	Satisfactory
Quality of Service	5.7	High

While service and hygiene were, in general, rated favorably, having high standards at all food outlets, particularly informal food outlets, would further enhance the overall dining experience and add to the city's attractiveness as a culinary destination.

#### 4.5. Cultural Interaction and Emotional Satisfaction

Cultural interaction through food was found to be a strong driver of improving emotional satisfaction. Table 5 proves that 80% of participants experienced a close emotional tie with the local culture through the typical food they consumed. Foreign visitors and international tourists indicated that foods such as Jigarthanda and Kola Urundai enabled them to connect with the local culture. Tourists developed a sense of belonging through the food and nostalgia, confirming the emotional connection to the destination. These emotional experiences also had an impact on tourists' satisfaction and intention to recommend Madurai as a food destination.

Table 5: Cultural Engagement and Emotional Satisfaction

Factor	Mean Score	Rating (1-7)
Emotional Connection to Local Culture	6.1	High
Likelihood of Recommending Madurai	6.0	High

Emotional pleasure derived from food is one of the significant elements of food tourism, as this makes one more connected with the destination. Tourists would develop emotionally rooted memories based on food, which would also make the connection to the place and culture stronger..

4.6. Overall Satisfaction

The overall satisfaction score, as shown in Table 6, was very high, with a mean score of 6.0. A large proportion of respondents (83%) expressed a high level of satisfaction with their culinary experience in Madurai. Both domestic and international tourists rated their satisfaction similarly, though domestic tourists, with their familiarity with the food, displayed slightly higher emotional attachment and satisfaction.

Table 6: General satisfaction with culinary experience

Factor	Mean Score	Rating (1-7)
Overall Satisfaction	6.0	High

The results emphasize that integration of authenticity, sensory attraction, cultural experience and service quality create a very satisfactory food experience for tourists. Authentic food, rich in culture, is the core of strengthening general satisfaction, and it is therefore an important component of Madurai's peak tourism product..

4.7. Discussion

Findings from this research validate the important position that culinary traditions hold in contributing to tourist satisfaction and the larger culinary tourism experience in Madurai. Authentic taste and Madurai's food heritage is the most important driver of satisfaction. Cultural and emotional ties created through food all contribute to the reputation of the city as a Indian tourist destination. In addition, maintenance of traditional cooking techniques and use of local ingredients is important to ensure the authenticity of food, which in turn maintains the cultural heritage and stimulates economic growth through tourism.

Although overall impressions of hygiene and service were favorable, informality means that consistency is needed, especially where food is involved. Maintaining high standards in all eating places will improve the image of Madurai as a food destination. In addition, the research underlines increasing cultural experience significance of food-based attractions for influencing tourists' perceptions and their willingness to revisit or recommend a place.

V. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that traditional cuisine in Madurai plays a crucial role to tourist satisfaction,

identity, and enhances the city as a major tourist destination. Conclusion indicates that the real flavor, sensory enjoyment and cultural heritage brought by the local cuisine within the area enhance substantially the overall satisfaction with the local and overseas tourists. Key foods like Kari Dosa, Jigarthanda and Kudal Kari not only gratify the taste buds, but also provide rich cultural narratives that enhance the emotional connection between tourists and destination.

This study focuses on the authenticity that is vital in developing memorable food experiences, both in flavor and appearance. The sensory attributes of Madurai's cuisine - spiced, texture, aroma, and visual appeal - are vital in the formulation of dinner perceptions and satisfaction. Moreover, the heightened emotional compounds through these indigenous kitchens enhance the sense of belonging and empathy, which enhances the overall tourist experiences.

But the study also revealed areas where there is need for improvement, particularly in hygiene and stability of the service in informal food environments. Ensuring that high service standards of cleanliness are maintained will further enhance the dining experience, and provide that visitors leave with good memories of the city and its culinary offerings.

In terms of economic contribution, there is evidence of the increasing relevance of peak tourism in terms of stimulating local economic development. In maintaining and projecting traditional food habit, Madurai can continue to draw tourists and safeguard cultural legacy and provide potential for local traders and small companies.

REFERENCES

[1] Ahmed, R., & Baranwal, G. (2023). The rise of food-based digital marketing in tourism. *Journal of Digital Tourism*, 5(1), 23–35..

[2] Chen, C. F., & Huang, W. J. (2021). Exploring emotional engagement in food tourism through apps. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(4), 555–568..

[3] Cohen, E., & Avieli, N. (2022). Food in tourism: Attraction and impediment. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 102, 103345.

- [4] Feldman, L., Rossi, M., & Bianchi, P. (2022). The sensory impact on tourist food satisfaction. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 29, 100537..
- [5] Iorio, M., & Lipari, D. (2021). Culinary heritage and tourism: A narrative approach. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 16(2), 120–135.
- [6] Khan, S., Patel, R., & Das, M. (2022). Traditional cuisine and tourist satisfaction: A multi-sensory experience study. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 42, 100900..
- [7] Sánchez, J. A., González, M. E., & Vázquez, C. (2021). Culinary tourism and intangible heritage preservation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 11(3), 245–260.
- [8] Lin, Y. C., Pearson, T. E., & Cai, L. A. (2021). Food as a form of destination identity: A tourism perspective. *Tourism Management*, 84, 104284.
- [9] Sánchez, J. A., González, M. E., & Vázquez, C. (2021). Culinary tourism and intangible heritage preservation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 11(3), 245–260.
- [10] Santos, J. M., López-Guzmán, T., & Cañizares, S. M. S. (2020). Culinary tourism and visitor satisfaction. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 22, 100237..
- [11] J. Williams,–Narrow- Sims, R. (2020). Exploring the role of food in tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 45(2), 176–187.
- [12] Tsai, C. Y., & Wang, Y. C. (2020). Food tourism and emotional experience: The impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 88, 102395.
- [13] Yang, Y., Guo, R., & Wang, Z. (2023). Sensory attributes and food tourism: A psychological perspective. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 29, 100769.