



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Guidelines for Promoting Gastronomic Tourism in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

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This research aims to assess the potential of gastronomic tourism and develop strategies to promote food tourism in Nonthaburi province. A qualitative research approach was employed to formulate promotional strategies, requiring interactions with key stakeholders in the local food tourism sector. The primary informants included chefs, restaurant business owners, food tourists, and relevant organizations, totaling 25 participants. The study identified four key strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism, known as the 4 C's of Gastronomy: 1. Culinary Community Promotion – Encouraging creative food tourism experiences that allow tourists to immerse themselves in Nonthaburi's diverse culinary culture. 2. Culinary Techniques Promotion – Showcasing traditional cooking techniques through tourism activities that align with seasonal local ingredients. This includes supporting local restaurants to achieve the Bib Gourmand recognition for outstanding ingredient presentation. 3. Culinary Enterprise Development – Supporting local food products, enhancing human resource development in gastronomic tourism, and fostering community participation in managing food tourism. 4. Culinary Experience Enhancement – Implementing continuous marketing and promotional campaigns via social media to establish Nonthaburi as a renowned food tourism destination. This initiative aims to position the province as a center for Thai culinary tourism and reinforce its role as a soft power for Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

The Thai food industry has been strategically developed as a soft power for Thailand. In 2023, Thailand ranked as the world's 12th-largest food exporter, with total food exports valued at 1,255,622.69 million baht, accounting for 12.80% of the country's total exports. Major export markets for Thai agricultural and food products include China, Japan, the United States, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with the highest export value attributed to fresh, chilled, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables. Key factors contributing to the growth of Thailand's food industry include global population expansion, demographic shifts toward an aging society, environmental changes, and economic and social conditions. These factors have heightened global demand for agricultural and food products to ensure food security (National Soft Power Strategy Committee, 2024).

Gastronomy tourism has been a prominent travel trend over the past decade. According to Katchwattana (2023), 53% of travelers select their destinations based on the food and beverages they wish to experience. This form of tourism continues to gain popularity, especially among solo travelers, who seek authentic engagement with local communities and culinary cultures. Many modern travelers rely on digital storytelling, sharing their food experiences through online platforms, which influences others' travel decisions. Additionally, tourists today enjoy immersive

food-related activities, including hands-on learning with local communities and directly supporting community-based food enterprises.

Prakenpattra and Chunkajorn (2024) emphasize the concept of creative tourism, where local communities add value to food tourism by fostering deeper tourist engagement. Through traditional cooking, local dining experiences, and social media storytelling, tourists develop strong connections with the community and its culinary heritage. Food, therefore, serves as a cultural medium, reflecting both historical and contemporary aspects of local traditions.

Similarly, Punturee (2015) highlights food as a key tourism attraction, capable of drawing visitors to specific destinations. Local cuisine not only represents a region's unique identity, lifestyle, and cultural traditions but also provides travelers with new and memorable experiences. Gastronomic tourism is considered a "special interest tourism" category, where food plays a central role in shaping visitors' experiences. Tourists engage with food using all five senses—sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch, enhancing their overall travel experience.

It is evident that gastronomic tourism plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage while also serving as a key service industry that generates revenue and employment for Thailand. The growing focus on food tourism stems from the country's distinctive tourist attractions and cultural heritage, which have been passed down through generations. One of the most notable gastronomic tourism destinations near Bangkok is Koh Kret in Nonthaburi Province. Koh Kret, a large island in the Chao Phraya River, has been a thriving community since the late Ayutthaya period. The island is home to historical temples and ancient landmarks, all of which were constructed during the late Ayutthaya era. It is officially designated as a subdistrict and is divided into seven villages, each contributing to the island's diverse culinary and cultural traditions.

Koh Kret's natural beauty and unique culinary heritage make it a standout destination for food tourism. As Nitiworakarn (2014) notes, Mon cuisine on Koh Kret is largely rooted in local wisdom, utilizing seasonal and locally available ingredients. A study on the diversity of Mon traditional food on the island revealed that Mon cuisine consists of eight categories of savory dishes (34 varieties) and four categories of desserts (9 varieties). This survey provides essential baseline data for linking Mon cuisine to Nonthaburi's cultural heritage, local customs, and traditions.

Examples of traditional Mon dishes include: *Kaeng Sawang Arom* (a fragrant Mon-style curry), *Kaeng Som Krajiab* (roselle sour curry), *Pla Ra Lon* (fermented fish dip), *Mee Krob* (crispy noodles), *Khao I Ga* (Mon-style rice dish), *Kaeng Liang Nor Kala* (spicy vegetable soup with fern shoots), *Kaeng Kua Matad* (a traditional Mon curry), *Kaeng Kha Moo Bai Ma Dan* (pork leg curry with Garcinia leaves), *Khao Niew Hua Hong* (sweet sticky rice), *Kaeng Phet Kluai Dib* (spicy green banana curry), *Kaeng Bon* (a unique local curry) and *Kanom Tian Mon* (Mon-style sticky rice dumplings). These dishes attract visitors eager to experience the authentic flavors of Mon cuisine.

Recognizing the significance of food tourism, the researcher has identified effective strategies to promote gastronomic tourism in Nonthaburi. The study's findings provide a practical framework for implementation at every stage of the research process. The goal is to maximize the benefits of food tourism while ensuring sustainable development for all stakeholders involved in Nonthaburi's culinary tourism sector.

Objective

To study strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism in Nonthaburi Province.

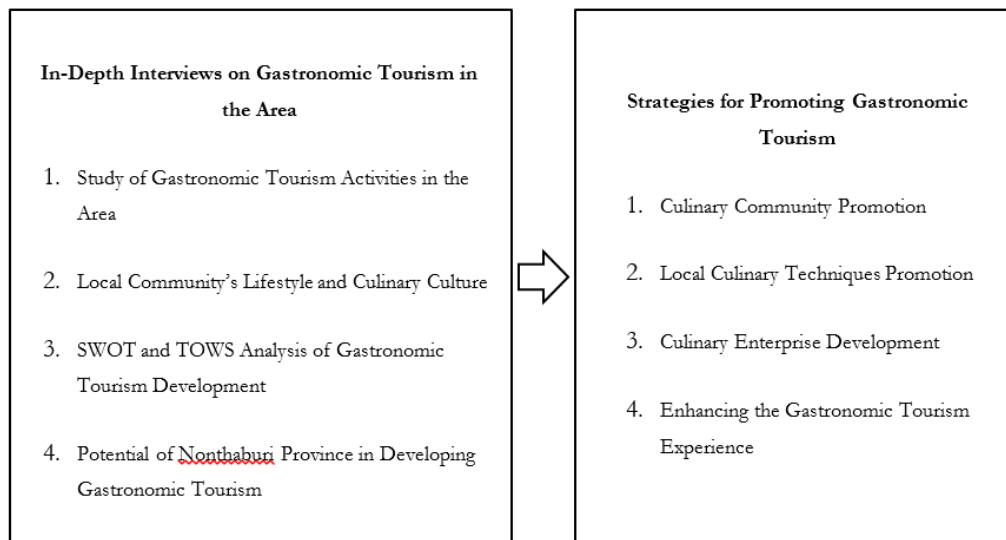


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Population and sample group

This study employed qualitative research methods, selecting a sample group comprising 25 key stakeholders, including chefs, restaurant business owners, food tourists, and relevant organizations involved in gastronomic tourism in Nonthaburi.

2. Research instruments

The primary research tool was in-depth interviews, using open-ended questions covering: Personal information, Awareness of gastronomic tourism promotion strategies, Consumer behavior regarding food tourism and Factors influencing gastronomic tourism patterns. The interviews focused on three key aspects:

- a. Potential of Nonthaburi's gastronomic tourism destinations
- b. Elements of food tourism
- c. Community participation in managing food tourism

3. Data collection

Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with individual respondents. Upon completion of the interviews, transcripts were prepared for further analysis. This research adopted the Constant Comparison Method, which involves coding the collected data, categorizing it, and comparing it with previously gathered information. This process ensures systematic theory development and continues until the data reaches theoretical saturation—when no new information emerges.

4. Data analysis

The study utilized content analysis, a qualitative method that systematically identifies specific attributes within the data based on theoretical frameworks. The analysis followed four key steps (Lincharearn, 2011): 1. Establishing document selection criteria 2. Designing the analysis framework 3. Considering the context and conditions of the data 4. Conducting the final analysis. To ensure data reliability, the triangulation method was applied, verifying data consistency across time, location, and respondents. If the same findings were obtained under different circumstances, the data was considered valid. Finally, the research findings were summarized and presented in a descriptive format, aligned with the research objectives.

RESULTS

Findings from in-depth interviews with key informants reveal several aspects of Nonthaburi's gastronomic tourism potential.

The strengths of Nonthaburi's food tourism lie in its rich cultural and historical attractions, which are well-developed and diverse, spanning both land and water-based tourism. Key attractions include

temples, Koh Kret, Mon pottery craftsmanship, and the traditional Mon community on the island. Additionally, Nonthaburi offers unique culinary experiences, such as Tod Mun Nor Kala (spicy fish cake with wild fern shoots) from Pak Kret, boat tours to visit temples, agricultural tourism intertwined with local food culture, and traditional fruit orchards. These elements, along with the province's well-known tourist spots, attract both domestic and international visitors seeking immersive cultural and gastronomic experiences.

However, the weaknesses of Nonthaburi's food tourism stem from its proximity to Bangkok, which affects community engagement and participation. Some areas lack sufficient collaboration from local residents, making it difficult to integrate food tourism into the community effectively. Additionally, service quality at restaurants and tourist sites remains inadequate, with some establishments struggling to accommodate large visitor volumes. Service staff also require better training in hospitality and food tourism concepts, as well as a deeper understanding of local attractions to provide informed recommendations to tourists. Furthermore, limited online marketing and social media presence have hindered widespread awareness and promotion of Nonthaburi's gastronomic tourism potential.

In terms of opportunities, there is strong potential to promote food tourism in proximity to temples and cultural learning sites, reinforcing the cultural and culinary heritage of the province. Establishing food trails featuring local restaurants and enhancing the visibility of Koh Kret—already a well-known destination—could further solidify Nonthaburi's reputation as a gastronomic hub. Community product development, food marketing strategies, and event promotion through social media are essential components for increasing awareness. Expanding the promotion of local food festivals and culinary events via platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok would significantly enhance the province's visibility and draw more food-oriented tourists.

Nonetheless, threats to Nonthaburi's food tourism development include urbanization and demographic shifts. As a semi-urban province adjacent to Bangkok, Nonthaburi faces challenges in long-term community engagement and collaboration, as well as limited continuous promotion efforts. The increasing outmigration of long-term residents and an aging population contribute to difficulties in sustaining local culinary traditions and organizing community-driven food tourism activities. These factors pose risks to the continuity of Nonthaburi's gastronomic tourism development, requiring proactive measures to maintain community involvement and preserve local food heritage.

The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis), along with the TOWS Matrix, has led to the identification of four key strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism in Nonthaburi Province.

1. Proactive strategies

- i. Implement policies to develop food tourism routes, creating structured connections between various gastronomic destinations.
- ii. Promote community-based food production using local ingredients and establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for restaurants.
- iii. Support and elevate local restaurants to gain national recognition, transforming them into community-based fine dining establishments that reflect Thai culinary soft power on the international stage.

2. Preventive strategies

- i. Conduct training programs to improve service quality and develop human resources in the food tourism sector. This includes initiatives like "One Village, One Thai Chef", a soft power-driven strategy aimed at enhancing Thailand's food industry workforce.
- ii. Strengthen gastronomic tourism marketing through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to expand outreach and attract food tourists.

- iii. Encourage local food production and raise the standards of local restaurants by developing menus under the "Amazing Thai Taste" initiative. Additionally, support local restaurants in achieving Bib Gourmand recognition, which highlights high-quality yet affordable local dining experiences in a welcoming atmosphere.

3. Corrective strategies

- i. Improve infrastructure and connectivity between food tourism sites, restaurants, and other key locations.
- ii. Support food tourism promotional campaigns and establish a monthly event calendar for Nonthaburi's culinary activities.
- iii. Establish a center for food heritage preservation, dedicated to conserving traditional recipes, cooking techniques, and culinary knowledge, ensuring the long-term sustainability of local food culture.

4. Responsive strategies

- i. Organize food tourism events with strategic marketing efforts to attract visitors and highlight Nonthaburi's unique culinary offerings.
- ii. Develop a seasonal food calendar, detailing the availability of locally sourced ingredients, enabling tourists to plan visits according to seasonal specialties.
- iii. Establish an online food distribution center, allowing for seamless ordering and delivery of Nonthaburi's local food products beyond the province.

Further studies on the elements of food tourism development in Nonthaburi have identified the following key factors:

1. **Tourism attractions** – Nonthaburi features a diverse range of restaurants, including riverside dining establishments and easily accessible venues via private and public transportation.
2. **Transportation and accessibility** – The province benefits from convenient access routes due to its proximity to Bangkok, making it an attractive food tourism destination.
3. **Tourism facilities** – Nonthaburi offers sufficient infrastructure, including parking areas, signage, public restrooms, and retail outlets. However, some locations, such as parking areas, may require maintenance or improvements.
4. **Tourism management** – The province has tourist information centers accessible through digital platforms, and many restaurants accept credit card payments and digital transfers, facilitating ease of transaction for visitors.
5. **Diversity of dining options** – Nonthaburi boasts a wide variety of culinary experiences, ranging from local street food stalls to fine dining establishments, with an emphasis on traditional cooking techniques and locally sourced ingredients to appeal to food enthusiasts.
6. **Tourism activities** – Beyond food tourism, the province offers a range of cultural and recreational activities, including temple visits, river cruises, pottery-making workshops, and local delicacies such as Tod Mun Nor Kala (spicy fish cake with wild fern shoots). The vibrant riverside community lifestyle also adds to the appeal of Nonthaburi as a food tourism destination.

The study highlights the importance of community involvement in managing food tourism in Nonthaburi. The province should prioritize the organization and allocation of space for food establishments to ensure cleanliness, safety, and accessibility. Additionally, consistent marketing and promotional efforts are crucial to enhancing visibility. Strengthening social media presence through platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok should be a continuous effort to sustain interest in Nonthaburi's food tourism scene. Furthermore, improvements in online food ordering and reservation systems, along with streamlined delivery services, could significantly enhance convenience for both tourists and local consumers.

By implementing these strategic measures, Nonthaburi can effectively position itself as a leading food tourism destination, ensuring long-term sustainable development and economic benefits for the local community.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism in Nonthaburi and to develop targeted approaches for enhancement in various aspects. The findings align with the 4 C's of Gastronomy framework and are consistent with Daengbuppha (2022), who identified four key components of gastronomic tourism:

1) Community-based tourism

2) Culinary heritage and wisdom

3) Food tourism enterprises

4) Gastronomic tourism experiences. Based on these insights, the researcher derived the following conclusions:

- a. The first key strategy, Culinary-Based Tourism, emphasizes immersive food tourism experiences that allow visitors to engage with authentic local cuisine in a way that aligns with community values and traditions. This approach involves leveraging locally sourced ingredients to generate income for the community, enhancing the region's identity through unique food products, and fostering collaboration between government and private sector stakeholders to support food tourism. Additionally, connecting gastronomic tourism with agricultural tourism can provide visitors with hands-on learning opportunities about farm-to-table food sourcing. Promoting the production of local, safe agricultural goods ensures that food tourism meets sustainable development goals. The enhancement of traditional food festivals in the province also aligns with previous research by Kunakornbodin et al. (2006), which highlighted that native cuisine, particularly plant-based local dishes, serves as a major attraction for foreign tourists due to its health benefits and distinctive regional flavors. Furthermore, this aligns with findings by Puntien, S., Chantachon, S., & Koseyayothin, M. (2019), who emphasized the importance of modernizing local food products to appeal to a broader audience. Their study on food tourism in Songkhla's old town demonstrated how government support in product design could transform a city into a UNESCO World Heritage culinary destination.
- b. The second strategy, Culinary Technique Promotion, focuses on preserving and showcasing traditional cooking methods as part of food tourism activities. These experiences should be seasonally relevant and integrated with local festivals or special events. Furthermore, food safety standards should be strengthened to build confidence among tourists unfamiliar with local cuisine, reducing risks of foodborne illnesses or allergic reactions. This finding aligns with research by Kitkanjanakun (2023) on the transmission of local food wisdom in Bang Kradi Community, which revealed that local culinary knowledge reflects deep-rooted intelligence derived from nature. The study found that Mon cooking techniques, in particular, are highly distinctive, utilizing locally available ingredients to create unique dishes that enhance the region's culinary appeal.
- c. The third strategy, Culinary Enterprise Development, focuses on enhancing the value of local food products and fostering entrepreneurial growth among food businesses. This involves the development of human resources in the local tourism sector, encouraging youth participation in food tourism management, and advancing food product design and innovation. Key initiatives include establishing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for food preparation, ensuring food safety compliance, and improving health and service quality standards for personnel involved in food tourism. This aligns with training programs conducted by the Department of Health, which emphasize proper food handling and hygiene practices for food business operators. Additionally, the promotion of traditional cooking techniques using native Thai herbs contributes to the preservation of authentic culinary

heritage. These findings are consistent with Limdumnern (2017), who highlighted that cultural tourism destinations must prioritize accessibility and infrastructure management. Essential elements include multilingual signage for tourists, ATM access points, tourist information services, and first-aid stations to ensure a seamless and enjoyable experience for visitors.

- d. The fourth strategy, Enhancing the Gastronomic Tourism Experience, emphasizes marketing and promotional efforts to establish Nonthaburi as a leading food tourism destination. This involves continuous online marketing campaigns to boost awareness and attract more visitors. The implementation of food tourism activities and marketing-driven events can help increase tourist engagement. This approach is supported by Chimbanrai (2015), who studied the potential of local food tourism in Nan Province. The study found that tourists highly valued the unique identity of Nan's local cuisine, and six key factors contributed to its successful promotion: 1) local food identity, 2) food quality, 3) pricing, 4) service, 5) restaurant atmosphere, and 6) marketing and publicity efforts. One effective promotional strategy is the development of a seasonal food calendar, which allows visitors to plan trips based on seasonal availability of local ingredients.

Furthermore, this strategy aligns with the findings of Punturee (2015), which emphasized that creating memorable culinary tourism experiences is crucial for attracting visitors. Successful strategies include offering food tastings, encouraging tourists to engage with local traditions and lifestyles, providing opportunities for purchasing food-related souvenirs, showcasing informative narratives about local cuisine, arranging visits to agricultural sites, and demonstrating the preparation of dishes using locally sourced ingredients. By integrating multisensory experiences—sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch—into food tourism activities, travelers can develop a deeper emotional connection with the destination, leading to greater satisfaction and long-term interest in Thailand's gastronomic tourism sector.

Research suggestions

In terms of general recommendations, relevant agencies in Nonthaburi involved in gastronomic tourism should conduct a follow-up analysis based on this study's findings. By doing so, they can further refine and develop comprehensive strategies to enhance food tourism in the province, ensuring continuous and sustainable growth.

For future research, academics, researchers, and interested parties should consider conducting quantitative studies to gain deeper insights into tourist perspectives on cultural and community-based food tourism. The variables identified in this study should be used as key factors in future research to expand existing knowledge and further strengthen Thailand's culinary heritage as a form of soft power on the global stage.

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