

Authenticity In Culinary Tourism: Understanding Tourist Expectations and Experiences

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Publication history: Received: December 19, 2025; Revised: January 9, 2026; Accepted: January 12, 2026

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of authentic culinary experiences on tourists' expectations and experiences in selected culinary destinations in Manila, specifically Binondo, Quiapo, and España. Grounded in theories of authenticity, expectancy theory, experiential consumption, and tourist experience typologies, the research aimed to assess how authenticity-related attributes shape tourist satisfaction and expectations across emotional, learning, meaningful, and enjoyment dimensions. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed using a structured survey questionnaire administered to 389 tourists aged 18 years and above who had visited the selected areas multiple times within the past one to two years. Data were analyzed using weighted mean, Shapiro–Wilk test, Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient, and Spearman's Rank Correlation to examine relationships between expectations and experiences. Findings revealed that authenticity significantly enhanced overall tourist satisfaction, particularly through genuine food presentation, quality, cultural immersion, and supportive service and atmosphere. Taste and quality of food, value for money, and service and atmosphere were positively associated with satisfaction, while authenticity emerged as the key differentiating factor across destinations. Strong positive relationships were found between tourists' expectations of authenticity and their actual experiences across all dimensions. Differences in meaningful and enjoyment expectations, as well as authenticity satisfaction, were observed among the three culinary districts. The study concludes that authentic culinary experiences play a critical role in shaping memorable and meaningful tourism experiences and recommends strengthening cultural authenticity, service quality, and collaborative destination management to sustain culinary tourism development. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by highlighting the role of authentic culinary tourism in supporting local livelihoods, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting responsible, community-based food practices. Overall, the findings contribute to socio-economic, cultural, and institutional sustainability by informing destination planning, tourism education, and sustainable urban tourism strategies.

Keywords: Authenticity; Culinary tourism; Sustainable tourism; Tourist expectations; Tourist experiences; Tourist satisfaction; Urban tourism

1. Introduction

Culinary tourism has emerged as a significant dimension of contemporary tourism, positioning food not only as a leisure commodity but also as a culturally embedded medium through which visitors encounter identity, heritage, and place. The increasing demand for authentic culinary experiences reflects tourists' desire to engage with local traditions, histories, and communities through food, particularly as travel behaviors and perceptions continue to evolve in the post-pandemic context (Santiago et al., 2022). Within this landscape, authenticity, satisfaction, and expectations remain central constructs in explaining tourist decision-making and in guiding destination strategies that balance cultural integrity with visitor value (Jacoba et al., 2024). At the destination level, the quality of service systems and assurance mechanisms also shapes the consistency of visitor experiences, highlighting the relevance of structured quality management and performance-oriented governance arrangements in tourism-related organizations (Gamit et al., 2024). Service delivery capacity and institutional responsiveness—especially in periods of disruption—further influence how tourists evaluate experiences and how destinations sustain trust and reliability (De Lara & Santos, 2024). In addition, the tourist experience is mediated by people and processes; thus, workforce development and compensation practices can affect service quality and perceived value across culinary corridors (Yu & Santos, 2025). As culinary destinations become more networked, digital readiness and documentation practices likewise contribute to effective coordination and delivery among multiple stakeholders (Jacoba et al., 2025), while capability-building initiatives that include scholarly writing and AI ethics can strengthen organizational learning, communication, and responsible innovation relevant to tourism systems (De Guzman et al., 2025). Finally, culinary tourism is inseparable from local food systems; agricultural productivity and input conditions contribute to the continuity, affordability, and identity of culinary offerings that destinations promote (Cacal et al., 2023). Against this backdrop, this study examines how authentic culinary experiences influence tourists' expectations and lived experiences

within selected culinary destinations in Manila—Binondo, Quiapo, and España—where diverse cultural food traditions coexist and continue to shape local tourism dynamics.

1.1 Authentic Culinary Tourism and Tourist Experiences in Selected Areas of Manila

Culinary tourism refers to travel motivated by the desire to experience local food and gastronomy as representations of cultural identity and lifestyle. Authenticity in culinary tourism is generally understood as food that communities recognize as traditionally local and culturally representative. As tourists increasingly seek genuine experiences, culinary authenticity has become a crucial factor influencing destination choice, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Gastronomy Tourism, 2021). However, defining and assessing authenticity remains complex, as perceptions are shaped by social context, marketing, and personal expectations. In the Philippine context, culinary tourism is recognized as a vital component of national development under Republic Act 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009, which identifies tourism, including culinary tourism, as an industry of national interest. Manila offers diverse culinary landscapes, particularly in Binondo, Quiapo, and España, where Chinese-Filipino, Islamic, and regional Filipino cuisines converge. These areas serve as living repositories of heritage food practices, contributing to tourists' cultural understanding and experiential satisfaction.

1.2 Authenticity, Food Attributes, and Tourist Expectations in Culinary Tourism Literature

Existing literature highlights authenticity, food quality, service, atmosphere, emotional engagement, learning, meaning, and enjoyment as key dimensions shaping culinary tourism experiences. Studies indicate that authentic local food enhances tourist satisfaction and loyalty by strengthening the quality–satisfaction–loyalty relationship (Zhang, Chen, and Hu, 2019; Sthapit & Björk, 2019). Authentic cuisine is also associated with cultural preservation and destination competitiveness (Octaviani & Roostika, 2021; Park et al., 2019; Morris, S., 2019). Taste and food quality significantly influence destination image and tourist loyalty (Gonzales et al., 2019; Gupta et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Service quality and atmospheric factors further shape customer experiences, with emotional engagement increasingly recognized as central to satisfaction in hospitality and tourism contexts (Teixeira et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2017; Shahzadi et al., 2018). Tourist experiences are also deeply emotional, as authentic food evokes pleasure, nostalgia, and attachment to place (Sthapit, Piramanayagam, & Björk, 2020; Ji, 2017). Culinary activities facilitate learning and cultural understanding through participation in cooking classes and food-related interactions (Serkan Yiğit., 2022; Antón et al., 2019; Kovalenko, 2022). Meaningful culinary encounters foster place attachment and responsible tourism by connecting food with history and community identity (Jubhilla and Meutias, 2022; Dutta and Naumov, 2020).

1.3 Culinary Tourism Authenticity in Local, National, and Global Tourism Contexts

Globally, culinary tourism is recognized as a niche market that supports cultural identity amid globalization and standardization of food systems (Chen & Huang, 2019; Okumu et al., 2019). In Europe and China, authenticity and sustainability have been identified as drivers of gastronomic tourism development, particularly in rural and agri-tourism settings (Baudoin et al., 2019; Martin, Izquierdo, & Laguna-Garcia, 2019). Nationally, Philippine studies demonstrate that gastronomic tourism contributes to socio-economic and cultural development, as shown in the Ilocos Region (Etrata, 2021) and Cavite City (Lastimoso et al., 2024). Locally, Manila's culinary districts reflect multicultural food traditions that offer authentic experiences shaped by historical migration, religious practices, and regional cuisines, positioning the city as a significant culinary tourism destination.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of Authenticity, Expectations, and Tourist Experience

This study is grounded in multiple theoretical perspectives explaining authenticity and tourist behavior. MacCannell's theory of objective and constructed authenticity explains how tourists negotiate genuine culinary experiences amid commercialization. Vroom's Expectancy Theory frames how tourists' expectations influence satisfaction based on perceived outcomes of culinary experiences. Erik Cohen's Typology of Tourist Experiences further categorizes tourists according to their varying desires for authenticity, from recreational to existential engagement. Experiential consumption theory underscores tourists' preference for memorable, sensory-rich experiences, positioning authenticity as a core driver of emotional and experiential value. Together, these frameworks explain how authenticity shapes expectations, satisfaction, emotional engagement, and revisit intentions in culinary tourism contexts.

1.5 Research Gaps in Examining Authentic Culinary Experiences and Tourist Expectations in Manila

Despite extensive literature on culinary tourism, limited empirical research examines the relationship between authenticity, tourist expectations, and experiences within urban multicultural settings in the Philippines. Existing studies often focus on rural or international contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how authenticity operates within dense urban culinary landscapes like Manila. Furthermore, comparative analysis of tourist expectations and experiences across multiple local destinations remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by quantitatively examining how authentic culinary experiences influence satisfaction and expectations among repeat visitors in Binondo, Quiapo, and España.

1.6 Alignment of Authentic Culinary Tourism with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This research aligns with SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth by highlighting culinary tourism's role in supporting local businesses, employment, and destination competitiveness. It contributes to SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities through the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and heritage food systems in urban settings. The study also supports SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production by emphasizing authentic, locally sourced food practices that sustain traditional culinary knowledge and community livelihoods.

1.7 Contribution of Authentic Culinary Tourism to Multidisciplinary

The study contributes to socio-economic sustainability by demonstrating how authentic culinary tourism enhances tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation, supporting local economies. It advances cultural sustainability by documenting the value of heritage cuisines in maintaining cultural identity and community pride. From an educational and institutional sustainability perspective, the findings inform tourism education, destination planning, and hospitality management by integrating authenticity, experience design, and sustainability principles. Collectively, the study provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, practitioners, and communities seeking to develop inclusive and sustainable culinary tourism initiatives.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationship between tourist expectations, experiences, and authenticity in culinary tourism. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, test relationships, and generalize findings to broader populations (Bhandari, 2023). A descriptive survey method was utilized to accurately describe tourists' perceptions of authenticity, food quality, value for money, and service and atmosphere, as well as their expectations in terms of emotional, learning, meaningful, and enjoyment dimensions. Descriptive research is suitable for addressing what, where, when, and how questions related to a phenomenon without establishing causal relationships (McCombes, 2023). The use of structured questionnaires enabled the researchers to gather measurable data and apply statistical analysis to examine trends and relationships relevant to culinary tourism experiences.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected culinary tourism areas in Manila, Philippines, specifically Binondo, Quiapo, and España. These locations were chosen due to their established reputation as major culinary destinations offering diverse and authentic food experiences shaped by cultural, historical, and regional influences. Binondo is recognized for its Chinese-Filipino culinary heritage, Quiapo for its traditional Filipino and Islamic cuisines, and España for its variety of regional dishes influenced by its proximity to academic institutions. These areas collectively represent key urban culinary tourism sites in Manila.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consisted of tourists aged 18 years old and above who had visited Binondo, Quiapo, and España at least two to three times within the past one to two years. A total of 389 respondents participated in the survey. These individuals were selected because their repeated visits indicate sufficient familiarity with the culinary experiences in the selected areas, allowing them to provide informed assessments of authenticity, satisfaction, and expectations. Their perspectives contributed to understanding how tourists perceive and engage with culinary tourism within Manila.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The target population for the study comprised tourists visiting Manila, which recorded 14,262,621 visitors in 2023 according to the Department of Tourism, Culture and Arts of Manila, excluding data from hotels, restaurants, and the Philippine Port Authority (Ong, G. 2024). The sample size of 389 respondents was determined using the Raosoft software, which calculates appropriate sample sizes based on confidence level, margin of error, and response distribution to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings (Project Topics, 2018). The study employed simple random sampling to select respondents, while purposive sampling criteria were applied to ensure that participants met the required characteristics relevant to the study. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess specific attributes aligned with the research objectives (Robinsons, 2024; Rai, N. and Thapa, B., 2015).

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured online survey questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to efficiently capture respondents' demographic profiles, levels of satisfaction with authentic culinary experiences, expectations related to authenticity, and perceived differences between expectations and experiences across the selected locations. The instrument underwent validation by the research adviser and five experts from Lyceum of the Philippines University Manila specializing in travel and tourism management. Their feedback guided revisions to ensure

content validity and clarity. The questionnaire was presented to respondents prior to data collection, and informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering involved the systematic collection of information to evaluate how culinary tourism contributes to tourists' expectations and experiences (Creswell, 2014). The researchers employed both online and face-to-face survey distribution methods to increase response rates. Respondents were informed of the study's objectives, assured of anonymity, and given the freedom to withdraw at any time. Surveys were administered using digital or paper-based formats, with each questionnaire requiring approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The collected responses were monitored for completeness and consistency throughout the data collection period.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

After data collection, responses were aggregated, organized, and subjected to statistical analysis. Weighted mean was used to describe respondents' perceptions of authenticity, satisfaction, and expectation factors, providing an overall measure of agreement or preference (BYJUS, 2021). The Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to assess the normality of data distribution (Malato, G. 2023). When data were normally distributed, Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Turney S, 2024). For non-normally distributed data, Spearman's Rank Correlation was employed to assess monotonic relationships between variables (Statistics How To). These statistical techniques enabled the researchers to examine relationships and differences between tourist expectations and experiences related to culinary tourism authenticity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

3.1.1 Age, Employment Status, Income Level, and Destination Visited

The majority of respondents belonged to the 18–25 age group, representing Generation Z, while a smaller proportion consisted of Millennials and minimal representation from Generation X and Baby Boomers. Most respondents were students, followed by those employed part-time and full-time. More than half reported having no income, while others fell within lower to middle-income brackets. Respondents were almost evenly distributed across the three destinations, with comparable representation from Binondo, Quiapo, and España. The dominance of young, student respondents suggests that culinary tourism in Manila is particularly attractive to younger travelers who may prioritize affordability, accessibility, and experiential value. This demographic profile may influence perceptions of value for money and expectations related to enjoyment, learning, and emotional engagement during culinary experiences.

3.2 Tourist Experiences of Overall Satisfaction

3.2.1 Authenticity

Respondents expressed strong agreement that authenticity significantly enhanced their satisfaction with culinary tourism experiences. Authentic culinary activities were perceived as enjoyable, culturally meaningful, emotionally engaging, and influential in destination choice. Overall responses reflected a high level of satisfaction associated with authentic food presentation and cultural immersion. These findings indicate that authenticity plays a central role in shaping positive culinary tourism experiences. Tourists value food that reflects local traditions and cultural identity, reinforcing authenticity as a key driver of satisfaction and meaningful engagement with destinations.

3.2.2 Taste and Quality of Food

The results showed strong agreement that taste and quality of food contributed significantly to overall travel satisfaction. Respondents indicated that high-quality food created memorable experiences, enhanced cultural immersion, and influenced destination selection. Taste and food quality remain fundamental components of culinary tourism satisfaction. Positive sensory experiences reinforce tourists' perceptions of destination value and contribute to lasting travel memories, supporting the role of food as a primary motivator in tourism.

3.2.3 Value for Money

Respondents generally perceived culinary experiences as affordable and worth their cost. They agreed that authentic culinary offerings aligned with their expectations and were reasonably budgeted within their travel experiences. The strong satisfaction with value for money suggests that tourists associate authenticity not only with cultural depth but also with perceived fairness in pricing. Affordable access to authentic food enhances overall satisfaction and encourages repeat visitation.

3.2.4 Service and Atmosphere

The findings indicated strong agreement that service quality and atmosphere enhanced perceptions of authenticity and comfort. Respondents appreciated how ambiance and surroundings supported cultural immersion and enriched the overall

dining experience. Service and atmosphere function as contextual elements that reinforce authenticity. A welcoming environment and attentive service help translate cultural narratives into tangible experiences, strengthening tourists' overall satisfaction.

3.3 Tourist Expectations of Adapting to Authenticity

3.3.1 Emotional Expectations

Respondents strongly expected authentic culinary experiences to evoke emotions such as joy, nostalgia, and excitement. Emotional connection with local culture and strengthened attachment to destinations were commonly anticipated outcomes. These expectations highlight the affective dimension of culinary tourism, where food serves as a medium for emotional engagement. Tourists anticipate experiences that go beyond consumption, fostering emotional bonds with destinations.

3.3.2 Learning Expectations

Tourists strongly agreed that culinary tourism offered opportunities for cultural learning, interaction with diverse ethnic groups, and exposure to unique local traditions. The findings emphasize culinary tourism as an educational experience. Food-related activities facilitate cultural understanding and intercultural exchange, reinforcing tourists' expectations for learning through gastronomy.

3.3.3 Meaningful Expectations

Respondents strongly expected culinary experiences to be meaningful, contributing to cultural appreciation, social connection, and memorable travel experiences rooted in local traditions. Meaningfulness in culinary tourism is closely tied to cultural depth and social interaction. Tourists value food experiences that convey heritage, identity, and a sense of belonging.

3.3.4 Enjoyment Expectations

The highest levels of agreement were observed in enjoyment-related expectations. Respondents indicated that food experiences were among the most enjoyable and memorable aspects of their trips. Enjoyment remains a dominant expectation in culinary tourism, underscoring food's role in creating pleasurable and lasting travel experiences that enhance destination appeal.

3.4 Relationship Between Tourist Expectations and Experiences

3.4.1 Authenticity and Overall Satisfaction

Strong and statistically significant positive relationships were found between tourist expectations of authenticity and overall satisfaction across emotional, learning, meaningful, and enjoyment dimensions. These results confirm that meeting authenticity-related expectations directly enhances tourist satisfaction. As authenticity increases, satisfaction levels rise, emphasizing the importance of aligning experiential offerings with tourist expectations.

3.4.2 Taste and Quality of Food

Significant positive correlations were observed between authenticity expectations and satisfaction with taste and quality of food across all dimensions. Authenticity enhances perceptions of food quality, suggesting that culturally grounded culinary experiences amplify satisfaction derived from taste and presentation.

3.4.3 Value for Money

Strong positive relationships were identified between authenticity expectations and satisfaction with value for money. Tourists perceive authentic experiences as more worthwhile, indicating that cultural value contributes to perceived economic value in culinary tourism.

3.4.4 Service and Atmosphere

Significant positive correlations were found between authenticity expectations and satisfaction with service and atmosphere. Authenticity strengthens perceptions of service quality and ambiance, highlighting its role in shaping holistic tourism experiences.

3.5 Differences Across Culinary Destinations

3.5.1 Differences in Tourist Expectations

No significant differences were found in emotional and learning expectations across destinations. However, meaningful and enjoyment expectations differed significantly among Binondo, Quiapo, and España. These differences suggest that destination-specific characteristics shape how tourists anticipate meaning and enjoyment. Cultural visibility, historical branding, and experiential framing likely influence these expectations.

3.5.2 Differences in Tourist Satisfaction

No significant differences were observed across destinations in terms of taste and quality of food, value for money, and service and atmosphere. Authenticity, however, showed a significant difference, with España and Binondo rated higher

than Quiapo. Authenticity emerged as the key differentiating factor among destinations. While operational aspects were perceived as consistent, cultural immersion and heritage representation distinguished tourist satisfaction levels, emphasizing authenticity as a competitive advantage in culinary tourism.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study examined tourist expectations and experiences related to authenticity in culinary tourism across Binondo, Quiapo, and España in Manila. The findings indicate that tourists' demographic profiles, particularly age, employment status, and income level, influence how authenticity, food quality, service, and cultural immersion are perceived. Overall satisfaction was strongly associated with authentic culinary experiences characterized by genuine local flavors, quality food, meaningful cultural engagement, and supportive service and atmosphere. Authenticity emerged as a critical factor shaping tourist satisfaction, with organized and culturally grounded culinary experiences contributing to more memorable and meaningful travel encounters. Variations in expectations and satisfaction levels were observed across destinations and demographic groups, underscoring the close relationship between tourists' preferences for authenticity and their overall culinary tourism satisfaction.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that culinary tourism stakeholders in Binondo, Quiapo, and España consider tourists' demographic differences when designing and delivering culinary experiences, as preferences and satisfaction levels vary across age, occupation, and income groups. Enhancing service quality, preserving cultural authenticity, and improving the overall dining environment are essential to sustaining positive tourist experiences. The development and promotion of structured culinary tours that highlight local heritage, traditional cuisine, and cultural narratives are encouraged, as these were found to enhance satisfaction. Strengthening cultural presentation, improving cleanliness and infrastructure, supporting heritage food establishments, and fostering collaboration among local communities, food providers, and tourism stakeholders are also recommended to improve authenticity, visitor satisfaction, and the long-term sustainability of culinary tourism in the three districts.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles of respect, confidentiality, and fairness throughout all stages of the research process. Participants were fully informed about the objectives and nature of the study prior to their involvement, and participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Measures were implemented to protect participants' privacy, and all collected data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the respondents who voluntarily participated in the study and shared their experiences and insights, which made the completion of this research possible.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct and reporting of this study.

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not explicitly stated for this study.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

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