

Perception of Indian Cuisine as a Tourist Attraction: A Study on Foreign Tourists visiting India

Dr. Surjeet kumar¹, Ishan Bakshi²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra
surjeetkumar.kuk@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra
ibakshi1988@gmail.com

Abstract : Indian cuisine has a history that is 5000-year old that encompasses different cultures that are interconnected in a way that leads to cuisine diversity. Indian delicacies are acknowledged all over the world for their taste, different flavors and diversity. The roots of Indian cuisine are deeply imbedded into Indian history because over a passage of time, each region has developed a unique set of dishes using a wide range of spices, unique ingredients combined with unique cooking styles. The motive of this study is to explore whether foreign tourist who visit India really believe that Indian cuisine is attractive or not. The results of the study revealed that there was a significant positive increase in the perceptions of foreign tourist after trying Indian cuisine. Variables that had positive higher perceptions were rich taste and flavor of food items, positive food experience, value for money, variety in menu, visual attractiveness, sufficient portion sizes, use of fresh ingredients and moderate price of food items. The statistical analysis inferred that the foreign tourists do consider Indian cuisine as tourist attraction.

Key words: Perception, Indian Cuisine, Foreign Tourist, Attraction, India

Introduction

According to **Hassan (2008)** cuisine of a destination is considered as a constitutive element that represents the impalpable heritage of a destination. **Bessiere (2009)** concludes that local cuisine of a destination is deeply embedded into its culture and the character and the frame of mind of the people of that region is revealed by the culinary practices of the region. Because of this the overall image of the destination is entrenched by the

cuisine of the destination (**Crofts, 2010**). As culinary experience is an inseparable aspect of the tourists' travel experience (**Rimington and Yüksel, 1998**) it helps in constructing and uplifting the culinary image of a destination which if deemed positively may lead towards the long-term destination competitiveness (**Lin et al., 2011**). With change in time food consumption for tourists is not a basic requirement anymore but become a way to satisfy physiological needs (**Burusnukul, Binkley, and Sukalakamala, 2011**). **Drewnowski and Moskowitz (1985)** have emphasized on importance of visual attractiveness of the food offerings as motivating factor for tourist to try a particular food item. **Quan & Wang (2004)** stated that the tourists are motivated to try new cuisine to have variety and cherish the memorable experience of unfamiliar food items that leads to achieving peak travel experience. In the opinion of **Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2008)** the factors that motivate the tourists to try local cuisine are physical, cultural and status and prestige of the tourist. **Jang et al. (2009)** have stated that sensory perceptions and nutritive value of the food item is what tourists are attracted towards more. According to **Baker and Crompton (2000)** for majority of tourists, price of the dishes is the primary factors contributing towards overall satisfaction followed by restaurants quality of service and quality of the food products. **Namkung & Jang, (2007)** have attested food quality as the primary factor leading to overall satisfaction based on dining experiences of the tourists asserting that food quality encompasses several

features like taste, freshness, presentation, nutrition value, variety or diversity, and temperature. According to **Ma et al. (2011)** key attributes that contribute towards overall satisfaction of the tourists are taste and variety of food items, authenticity, food aroma, food presentation, hygiene, prompt and friendly service, décor, ambience and cleanliness of the eating place and value for money.

Literature Review

For more than two decades academicians have shown a huge interest in identifying and exploring food gastronomy as a branch of the tourism and hospitality research field. A considerably large number of publications were found concerning the relationship between food of a tourist destination and tourists' travel experiences and perceptions of people about food of a region.

Role of food in tourism

Kyriakaki et al (2016) proved that the use of local products helps in the promotion of local cuisine and subsequently the preservation of traditional skills and region's culinary heritage. It also helps in high customer satisfaction and creating an authentic dining experience for the tourists that leads to the tourists spending more on specialized food products. **Sormaz et al (2015)** confirmed that gastronomy of a region helps in the regional development by making a strong bond between food and tourist activities. It strengthens the regional identity and helps in safeguarding cultural heritage of the region. **Henderson (2014)** concluded that food of a region represents the ethnic identity of a destination through its heritage. The food heritage of a region connects the tourists to the past of that region and enables the tourists to connect with the local people and know more about a destination through authentic taste of local food offerings. According to **Tikkaanen (2007)** food in the tourism industry has been recognized as a part of the local culture, which tourists consume, a part of tourist promotions, potential component of economic development and an important regional

factor that influences the consumption patterns and food preferences of tourists.

Food and dining experiences of tourists

According to **Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2014)** authentic and original local dishes, new food experience, atmosphere and environment of the dining place are the key factors that significantly contribute towards overall positive food experiences. Apart from these factors local food culture and dining aesthetics are also helpful in facilitating a memorable culinary experience. **Updhyay and Sharma (2014)** concluded that foreign tourist preferences can be segregates as five dimensions: 1) Food taste and quality 2) Food preparation 3) Local food offerings and dining etiquettes 4) Food tradition and nutritive value and 5) Food aroma and cleanliness; out of which food taste and quality and traditional and local food offerings are the most dominant. **Chang, Kivela and Mak (2011)** revealed that factors like taste and flavor of the local food offerings, cooking methods, authenticity and variety in the menu are the key determinants of customer satisfaction. Other factors that greatly influenced the levels of dining satisfaction of the tourists are service staff communication with the guests, attitude of the service staff and service speed. **Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009)** asserted that the tourists try the local food of the destinations to get exciting and authentic experience of the food and learn more about the culture. Other factors that affect the decision making are health concerns, food sensory appeal and physical environment of the food outlet.

Food and tourist satisfaction

Chi et al. (2013) attested that tourist's perceived food image directly influences the customer food satisfaction and his culinary experience. Food satisfaction increases the culinary experience and positively influences a tourist behavioral intention toward the food of that region. **Ab Karim et al (2011)** highlighted that attributes of quality, variety and authenticity of food help in constructing the food image of a particular cuisine and

overall satisfaction of customer. Attribute of food core value like price, service quality, ingredients used and food choice and food accessibility play a strong role in customer food satisfaction. When it comes to customer behavioral intentions customers look for variety in the cuisine rather than try the same food items again and again. **Nield et al. (2000)** proved that considerable differences exist between tourist groups' satisfaction with regard to perceptions of value for money, quality of food, number of dishes, food service standards, and variety of dishes, food presentation and service speed. They further conclude that food service contributes strongly towards tourist satisfaction during their holiday trips and attributes like food quality, food presentation, variety, value for money, considerably affect the overall food service experience of the tourist.

Food as a Tourist attraction

Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) highlighted that food of a destination can attract tourist as per their food related attitudes and desired culinary conversance can be facilitated by understanding their dining behavior. **Kumar (2016)** manifests that the rural regions have a lot to offer in terms of its splendid authentic regional delicacies but are unable to capitalize the regional tourist market due to lack of promotion and branding. This can be done by identifying the regional dishes and present their provincial cooking style through live kitchens in craft festivals, regional events, dance festivals, cultural programs, film festivals and exhibitions all across the country. **Richards et al (2015)** highlighted that factors like core eating behavior, assured taste of own food and familiar flavor are the factors that strongly motivate the tourists to stick to their own cuisine rather than trying unfamiliar food. However the factors that motivate the tourists to consume local food of a destination are exploring local culture, savoring authentic travel experience, new cuisine learning opportunity, influence from references of friends and internet. **Banerjee (2015)** asserts that the cuisine of the country is very popular among the tourists

as it provides endless varieties. The use of amalgam of different spices and herbs and traditional cooking style can cure man upsetting of the body and satisfy people both internally and externally. According to **Kivela and Crofts (2006)** culinary experiences are intimately linked to a region and provide the necessary impetus in building the culinary image of that region. Culinary offerings of a region decide how tourists perceive that destination. Destination food offerings increase the likeliness of tourist to revisit that destination to enjoy its unique delicacies again. **Hjalager and Corigliano (2000)** revealed that factors like distinctive culinary specialties, use of fresh products, food quality control, emphasis of food contamination and strict control over health issues create positive image of a cuisine among tourists.

Food and Perception

According to **Li et al (2013)** perception is conscious act of seeking information through our senses. When it comes to food, food images are used as used as a tool to elicit perceptions based on food taste experiences. **Okajima, and Spence (2011)** conclude that food images create different taste perception for different people based on their differences in expectations. **Chi et al. (2013)** attested that tourist's perceived food image directly influences the customer food satisfaction and creates a positive food experience which in turn positively influences a tourist behavioral intention toward the food of that region. The perceived expectation about the food taste is strongly influenced by visual impressions of food items which in turn influences their actual taste (**Gayler and Sas, 2017**). **Zellner et al (2011)** postulated that there is a higher acceptance of food items among consumers when they are presented in a well arranged manner. The neat and attractive visual appearance of the food items creates a positive perception about the food quality. According to **Michel et al (2014)** the sensory perception of a customer about a dish is influenced by the expectations through visual clues. However there is difference in the expectation and the actual food

consumption experience. A well planned artistic display of the food item creates a positive perception about the dish even before trying. However when that dish is actually presented to them the way they expected and consumed, it enhances their assessment and perception about that dish in a positive manner. A recent study conducted by **Kim et al. (2021)** reveals that cognitive cuisine information acquisition and prior knowledge formation jointly influence the food tasting experiences of the tourists. Textual and visual information regarding cuisine can be achieved through standing text panels, animated videos and pictures, traditional drawing and paintings and other multimedia tools. When these factors are combined with actual visual appearance and food taste they greatly impact the food taste experiences develop a food taste perception about the cuisine.

Studies mentioned in different segment above have proved that food of a destination reflects the tradition, lifestyle and culture of that region and plays key role in attracting tourists and providing memorable culinary experiences that affects overall satisfaction of tourist. Therefore we can conclude that cuisine is an integral aspect of collective travel experience and attractiveness of cuisine contributes significantly in promoting tourism. But so far no strong study has been conducted from the perspective of foreign tourists visiting India that describes that Indian cuisine or food can be considered as an important tool in attracting tourist.

Objectives of the Study

The study has following objectives:

1. To study the difference in perceptions of foreign tourists about Indian cuisine before trying it and after trying it.

2. To study the potential of Indian cuisine as a tourist attraction.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. H₁: There is significant difference in perceptions of foreign tourists about Indian cuisine before trying it and after trying it.
2. H₂: Foreign tourists do consider Indian cuisine as a tourist attraction.

Research Methodology

For data collection 10 different cities were covered which include Shimla, Manali, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Agra, Varanasi, Rishikesh and Haridwar. Non probability convenience technique of sampling was employed by the researcher where the probability of selection of each sampling element was not known (Alder & Clark, 2006). The researcher was able to approach 432 foreign tourists successfully who filled the questionnaire completely. All the respondents were adult and had tried Indian cuisine during their visit.

Result and Analysis

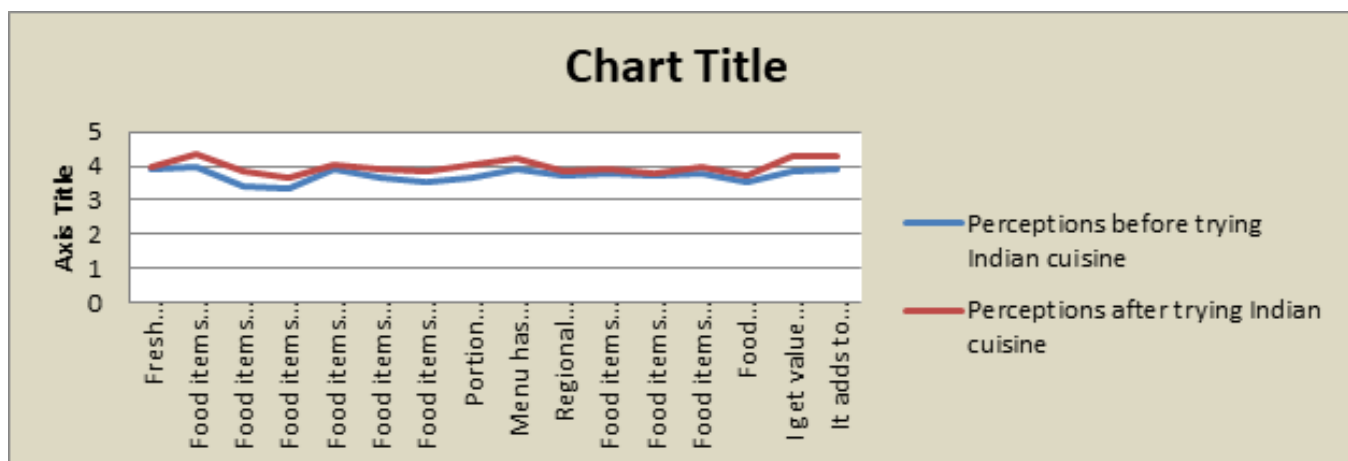
In order to prove our 1st hypothesis a paired a paired t-test was applied to determine the significant difference in perception of foreign tourist regarding Indian cuisine before and after trying it. The mean score of perception of foreign tourist is presented in table 1 displaying the statistical inference in the form of mean, standard deviation, perception gap, t- value, sig. value (2 tailed).

Perceptions of foreign tourist after trying Indian cuisine

The data displayed in figure 1 shows that the tourists have high perception about the “rich taste and flavor of food items (4.31)”, followed by “positive food experience (4.26)”, “value for money (4.25)”, “variety in menu (4.21)”, “visual attractiveness (4.05)”, “sufficient portion sizes (4.00)”, “use of fresh ingredients (3.93)” and “moderate price of food items (3.93)”. Similarly foreign tourists have moderate perception about whether food is “traditional and ethnic (3.91)”, ‘well

garnished/ decorated (3.89)”, “food items are healthy and safe to consume (3.85)”, and “inclusion of regional dishes in the menu (3.82)”. Attributes like “food items are convenient to consume (3.81)”, “food items are authentic and exotic (3.79)”, “food service is quick and fast (3.74)” and “food items are easy to digest (3.63)” are perceived very low by foreign tourists. This explains that attributes stakeholders need to focus more on providing fast and efficient food service to the tourists and at the same time they have to work upon developing new products that are convenient and safe to consume and easy to digest.

Figure 2: Difference in perceptions of foreign tourists about Indian cuisine before and after trying it



Difference in perceptions of foreign tourists about Indian cuisine before and after trying it

To determine the differences in perception of foreign about Indian cuisine before and after trying it GAP analysis was done. It is done by subtracting the mean values of perceptions before trying Indian cuisine from mean values of perceptions after trying Indian cuisine. The GAP analysis showed that all the attributes of perception after trying Indian cuisine had higher mean value as compared to the attributes of perception before trying Indian cuisine. This concludes that the actual experience of the foreign tourists was on positive side from what they had expected from the food offerings. The difference between the actual experience and expected experience is clearly visible from figure 2.

By analyzing the results of the paired t- test (table 1) it is clearly evident that out of 16 variables there are only 2 variables (** values in table 1) namely “Fresh ingredients are used in food preparation(.742)” and “Food items are authentic and exotic(.192) who have p-value greater than 0.05. Corresponding these results to our 1st hypothesis it is evident that there has been a positive increase in the perception of foreign tourists after trying Indian cuisine as the actual experience exceeded their expectations. Thus alternate hypothesis (H_1) is partially accepted.

To test our 2nd hypothesis (Foreign tourists do consider Indian cuisine as a tourist attraction) a multiple linear regression was done on the collected data at 95% confidence level. Before applying regression analysis, the data was tested for outliers, normal distribution, data linearity, homoscedasticity and autocorrelations.

Table 2: Residual statics for multiple Regression

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|--|----------|---------|--------|----------------|-----|
| Predicted Value | 3.0152 | 4.7316 | 3.9117 | .31424 | 432 |
| Residual | -1.83884 | 1.02998 | .00000 | .40241 | 432 |
| Std. Predicted Value | -2.853 | 2.609 | .000 | 1.000 | 432 |
| Std. Residual | -4.564 | 2.557 | .000 | .999 | 432 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Cuisine Attractiveness | | | | | |

Analysis of standard residuals (table 2) for outliers show that the minimum value of standard residual is above -3 and maximum value is below 3 indicating that the data had no outliers. After checking and meeting the assumptions successfully a linear multiple regression was applied.

The regression equation used for analysis:
 Cuisine Attractiveness = $\alpha + (\beta_1 \times \text{Attributes of Indian cuisine})$

Table 3: Linear regression between Cuisine Attractiveness and Attributes of Indian cuisine

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | .615 ^a | .379 | .377 | .40287 | 1.700 |
| Predictors: (Constant), Attributes of Indian cuisine | | | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Cuisine Attractiveness | | | | | |

Data displayed in table 3 indicated that $R^2 = .379$ which means that 37.9 % of the total variance in the Cuisine Attractiveness is explained by the attributes of Indian cuisine in the model.

Table 4: ANOVA for linear regression between Cuisine Attractiveness and Attributes of Indian cuisine

| MODEL | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 42.560 | 1 | 42.560 | 262.220 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 69.792 | 430 | .162 | | |
| | Total | 112.353 | 431 | | | |
| Dependent Variable: Cuisine Attractiveness | | | | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant), Attributes of Indian cuisine | | | | | | |

As shown in table 4 the F-statistic is 262.220 with p-value 0.000 which indicates that the model is statistically significant.

Table 5: Predictors of Cuisine Attractiveness in significant regression model

| Model B | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|------------------------------|--------|------|
| | | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .660 | .202 | | 3.274 | .001 |
| | Attributes of Indian cuisine | .823 | .051 | .615 | 16.193 | .000 |

By looking at the unstandardized coefficients in table 5, it is concluded that every one unit increase in the independent variable results in .823 unit increase in the dependent variable while keeping other variables constant. Looking into the standardized coefficients, attributes of Indian cuisine had .615 unit influences on Cuisine Attractiveness. The p-value (0.001) of the slope coefficients of t statistics (3.274) is less than 5% significance level which means that significant relationship has been observed between the attributes. Further for attributes of Indian cuisine p-value is significant (<0.05), which means there is significant relationship between Indian cuisine attributes and the Cuisine Attractiveness. Hence our alternate hypothesis (H_2) is accepted.

Conclusion

The study was conducted with the purpose to understand the perception of foreign tourist regarding Indian cuisine as a tourist attraction. The deciding variables of the study were the attributes of Indian cuisine that motivate the foreign tourists to try Indian cuisine and the attribute of perception. The statistics revealed that there was a positive increase in the perception of foreign tourists after trying Indian cuisine indicating that for 14 attributes of Indian cuisine, the actual experience of the tourists exceeded their expectations. The attributes that had high score were rich taste and flavor of food items and positive food experience followed by value for money, variety in the menu and visual attractiveness of the food items. The results of the study further revealed that more focus is required on providing fast and efficient food service to the tourists and new products needed to be developed that are convenient for foreign tourist to

consume. Results of the regression analysis confirmed significant relationship between the attributes of Indian cuisine and Cuisine Attractiveness. This proves that foreign tourists are satisfied with their food experience and have positive perception about Indian cuisine. Therefore it is inferred that foreign tourists do consider Indian cuisine as a tourist attraction.

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