

Turning Local Delicacies into Gastronomy Tourism: Sadafa Hotel and Suites in View

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Abstract

Knowing a territory's culture, traditions and customs requires some knowledge of its cuisine. Such knowledge helps to support a positive action which can sustain cultural preservation through gastronomic tourism. Gastronomy tourism offers a chance to revitalise and diversify tourism, advance regional economic growth, and serves as a means of preserving and transmitting traditional cuisines, cooking techniques, as well as strengthening community identity and pride. However, this type of tourism is not well known in Nigeria, particularly in the study area where tourism is still at the infancy stage. Whilst there are some unique cuisines that are known amongst the people in the hotel business, their capability to turn them into gastronomy tourism still calls to question in the study area, hence, the reason for this study. Through a case study approach, the study used semi-structured interviews to collect data from 10 participants who understood the topic of interest. The findings revealed that gastronomy tourism has no significant impact due to lack of appropriate skills and knowledge to promote it. Nevertheless, it identified boosting the destination's image and sharing bonds among people, as well as bridging the gap for sustainability as opportunities that may influence and support gastronomy tourism in the area. The study concluded that involving tourism experts and other stakeholders are viable strategies that can help in developing and sustaining gastronomic tourism not just in the region but also across Nigeria.

Keywords: cuisines, gastronomy tourism, sustainable development, Sadafa Hotel

Introduction

Being aware of a territory's culture and way of life requires some essential knowledge of its cuisine. Cuisine encompasses respect for culture and history, authenticity, sustainability, feelings, and a healthy lifestyle. Food traditions are usually perceived as important markers of identity, culture and local heritage. Food is an integral part of human life, hence its safety is critical to human health (Amaechi & Oga, 2021). Interestingly, food, has ever since, become an indispensable part of every community and it is considered as intangible heritage, a valuable tourism resource and an essential tool for destination image and branding (Naumov & Hassan, 2022). Thus, culinary tourism was birthed as an aspect of tourism that supports trips to foreign countries where purchasing a variety of spices, wines and different beverages are made for tourism development. It is feasible to advertise locations through their food (Dražković, 2016), due to the close ties embedded in its history, tradition, culture, and religion.

Several countries around the globe such as China, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Ghana, among many others have started promoting their own local cuisine, ingredients, and peculiarities. The phenomenon and relationship between tourism and consumption of food is referred as food tourism, culinary tourism or gastronomy tourism (Horng & Tsai, 2010; Ignatov & Smith, 2006). Hence, the potential of every destination can be found in its gastronomy owing to the fact that each has a distinctive local food which has to be acknowledged as a tourism product (Dražković, 2016). Gastronomy tourism is travel that is primarily driven by a desire to eat well (Choe & Kim, 2018; de la Barre & Brouder, 2013); as well as experience a region's flavor and develop a sense of place (World Food Travel Association, 2019). For Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman (2018), food tourism is a tool that visitors may use to engage with locals and learn about the cultural anthropology of the area they are visiting, hence, it is a diversified industry that includes activities like taking cooking classes, touring gorgeous vineyards, and visiting farms (World Food Travel Association, 2020); expanding and gaining interest from both food and tourist businesses including research in the fields of tourism and hospitality (de Albuquerque Meneguel, Mundet, & Aulet 2019; Ellis et al., 2018; Nummedal & Hall, 2006). Gastronomy offers a chance to revitalise and diversify tourism, advance regional economic growth, include many professional sectors such as manufacturers/suppliers, chefs, marketplaces, among others, whilst giving primary sectors new uses.

Yet similar development cannot be said of Nigeria that is known for her rich varieties of food from different ethnic groups, but with a rather untapped food tourism industry. These issues are pronounced owing to lack of interest in tourism development in Nigeria. Nworie (2015) noted that most localities in Nigeria are endowed with cuisines that are of special interest to both local and international tourists. For instance, Nsukka, one of the major and most populous LGAs in Enugu State, has exotic cuisines portrayed in both

their annual festivals and included in their daily consumption. They include: *Ayaraya Oka* or *azuzu* (maize + oil bean + vegetable); *Ayaraya Ji* (yam + oil bean); *Achicha* (coco yam + oil bean); *Okpa* (cowpea); and *Igbangwu Oka* (maize + vegetable).

This study examines how these local delicacies can attract tourists to Sadafa Hotel and Suites, Nsukka, Enugu State, whilst turning the local cuisines into gastronomy tourism. Furthermore, the lack of understanding of food tourism as a veritable tool for developing tourism and the local economy has caused issues such as: local foods losing their authenticity or originality; destination becoming unknown; its people losing sight of the beauty of their cuisines and their preparation and passing the knowledge to the next generation. This study is structured as follows: review related literature to ascertain the sustainability of gastronomic tourism development, overview of the study area to place the study in context, followed by the methodology, findings and discussions.

Literature review

The idea behind gastronomy tourism is to learn about and experience a region or nation's gastronomic culture through eating, tasting, and enjoying it. It is crucial while developing destination into a culinary hub to take into account both the local and global components of culinary goods (Drašković, 2016). Whilst new gastronomic options are always being developed around the globe, hospitality and the culinary arts certainly have a huge influence on how gastro-tourists view their travels in Greek gastronomy (Manolaa & Koufadakis (2020)). Also, cuisine has become a distinctive product that helps a location or destination stand-out, providing significant economic opportunities.

The element of a culture and tradition that endures the longest is always its culinary component, hence, culinary tourism should be promoted and supported actively owing to its significance in regional development and economic conditions, as exemplified in Rome, Italy (Sormaz, Akmeseb, Gunes, & Aras 2015). Local cuisines are also distinctive sources to create, launch, and advertise a destination in today's marketing environment, where there is fierce competition thereby making marketing of destinations a complex phenomenon (Uner, 2014). Another importance of gastronomy tourism to destinations is its ability of providing direct and indirect employment and monetary benefits owing to its activities (Sahin, 2015), making it one of the aspect of tourism that promotes development.

Additionally, gastronomic tourism is regarded as being extremely important because it can make tourists' trips extremely unique as well as demonstrate that consuming food and beverages can have symbolic meanings in addition to simply meeting one's dietary requirements (Calskan, 2013). In Ukraine, it helps to revitalize and diversify tourism and contribute to local and socio-economy development by maintaining or reopening the production of specific goods, generating new jobs, enhancing the image of the destination,

and luring influx of tourists to the area (Nesterchuk, Balabanyts, Pivnova, Matsuka, Skarha, & Kondratenko, 2021).

Speaking of gastronomy tourism in the Island of Andaman and Nicobar, Kumar (2019) averred that the traditional regional cuisine captures a location's cultural and historical background, adding that a major advantage of culinary tourism is its ability to boost local economy. Food is something that is not impacted by weather but available all year round and at any time of day. Kumar further noted that marketing tourism in a certain way and enhancing tourists' sites depends greatly on cuisines which in turn serves as a means of increasing travel. To support this assertion, Piboonrungrroj, Wannapan, and Chaiboons (2023) noted that Thailand's ability to thrive economically depends on the promotion of culinary tourism which can make a major contribution to the country's GDP. Their study continues to support the idea that culinary tourism is a crucial activity for Thailand's tourism economy

Furthermore, travelers always have money set aside for food and drinks especially local cuisine of the destination or location visited to enable them have a taste of the cultural aspect of the area. Food reflects local culture in the form of distinctive gastronomic values because it is the result of regional social, natural, and cultural aspects (Gordin, Trabskaya, & Zelenskaya, 2016). For Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009) and Hillel, Belhassen & Shani (2013), gastronomy plays a crucial role in illustrating a destination's culture. Hence, this component of gastronomy draws travelers who are eager to discover new cultures through local cuisine and drinks (Kumar, 2019). Also, it is averred that authentic local cuisine is a key pull for travelers and an important aspect of the overall travel experience (Henderson, 2009). Foreign visitors were more concerned with the restaurants' authenticity of their Africanism, at V&A Waterfront restaurant in South Africa (Mutsango, 2011). In this sense, food tourism has become more popular as a way of promoting culture and diversifying the tourism industry. In addition to the apparent advantages of supporting the tourism sector, the World Tourism Organization found that 88.2% of tourist destinations viewed gastronomy as a key component in creating their image and brand (Okech, 2014; Guruge, 2020). Racho (2019) supports this advantage by claiming that culinary tourism enhances local economies, fosters food security, and fosters the development of a distinctive brand for a destination.

Gastronomy tourism is crucial for promoting the authenticity of destinations, regions, or places where gastronomic events are taking place (Guruge, 2020) cited in (Josephine, 2021). It promotes food festivals that are centred on luring visitors to sample foods and beverages that are native to a given geographical area and are thus serves as efficient advertising tools for culinary heritage and distinctive qualities of the destination (Iriguler, 2017). The author noted that through food festivals, local communities are given the chance to advertise their goods while also sharing what they value, strengthening local social cohesion. Iriguler further suggests that gastronomic

tourism has multiplier effects which include raising demand for hotels, transportation services, employment generation, infrastructure development, enhanced destination image, community empowerment, market for local products and opportunities for exporting local products just like other forms of tourism. Additionally, a destination should not be appealing only from a food perspective, it should also have good infrastructure, organisations, local hospitality and marketing (Williams, 2014). Therefore, for gastronomic tourism to function properly, provision of infrastructure and other support services is key.

Nigeria is not left out in this discourse particularly in Lagos where Nwokorie (2015) noted that cuisine is an integral part of all cultures, a significant component of the world's intangible heritage, and a growing tourist attraction. The connections between food and tourism can serve as a platform for regional economic growth that can be enhanced by utilising culinary experiences while promoting and branding travel destinations. The author additionally noted there are potential economic opportunities for the industry, hence the need to encourage internal market food safety and quality control while addressing the barriers to the industry's growth.

Despite the advantages that a place can get from establishing gastronomic tourism, studies on the topic are still scarce and the growth of gastronomy tourism as a kind of tourism is still in its infancy Josephine (2021). The author further offered a number of recommendations such as: research on culinary tourism needs to take a stakeholder perspective; development of gastronomic tourist packages and routes, as well as the documentation of the real culinary features of each County to give culinary tourism in Kenya a strategic place within the larger framework of tourism policy. Guruge (2020) argued that though food is the main motivation for visiting a destination in gastronomic tourism, food alone is not sufficient to create a brand image of the destination. As alluded by (Williams, 2014) a destination should not be appealing only from a food perspective, it should also have good infrastructure, organisations, local hospitality and marketing. Nesterchuk, et al (2021) also avowed that it helps to revitalize and diversify tourism and contribute to local economic development because it includes various professional sectors - manufacturers, chefs, food, markets, travel and hospitality businesses and related businesses organizations. Thus, for gastronomic tourism to function properly, provision of infrastructure and other support services is key. Globalisation has threatened localization of food through bringing new foods and new methods of cooking to local areas resulting in fusion cuisines thus diluting the authenticity of the food packaged for gastronomic tourism.

Additionally, Guzel (2016) suggested that even if gastronomical destination marketing is premised on the exclusivity of food, there is reservation on the extent to which the food is actually pure and authentic; this notion is supported by Chaney (2012), who also indicated that hybridisation

of menus is a likely outcome of globalisation. Simply put, globalisation has affected local cuisines' in most hotels in Africa. Other challenge is brand image being consistent with what has been marketed to tourists (Guruge, 2020). Challenges to the growth of gastronomical tourism in a destination also include difficulties with food safety, hygiene, and quality issues related to poor handling during production, collection, processing, and distribution were strongly cited as major issues that threatened the development of gastronomical tourism in Nigeria by Nwokorie (2015).

Having studied the sustainability of gastronomy tourism in Romania, Gheorghe, Tudorach, and Nistoreanu (2014) averred that food tourism has emerged as an essential component to understanding a destination's culture and way of life. This embodies all the traditional values connected to the new trends in tourism, such as respect for culture and tradition, an authentic way of life, sustainability, experience, among others. Food tourism in Romania also forms part of local sustainable development pillar which serves as a multifaceted platform that connects the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability (Diaconescu, 2016). The results also showed that locals view tourism as a driver of development.

Sustainability of gastronomic tourism in Malaysia is powered by the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board by pro-actively and aggressively promoting Malaysian food heritage at the global market (Sanip and Mustapha, 2020). The action has not only drawn in foreign tourists to the nation, but also helped to sustain the Malaysian culinary tourism business through substantial marketing and promotional efforts. This significant effort has been made also to sustain the social and environmental benefits of Malaysia's gastronomy tourism through the preservation of the country's culinary heritage. They can also be seen as a first step in preserving and integrating the growth of culinary culture as a key component of tourism history (Tibere & Aloysius, 2013). Additionally, by working together, local governments and communities can implement a policy that focuses on maintaining traditional local food preparation methods and authentic local food recipes gradually, reducing the chance of losing regional delicacies (Tibere & Aloysius, 2013).

Drawing from the review of available literature, one can see that turning local delicacies into gastronomy tourism is multifaceted and needs deeper exploration. Therefore, this paper draws from the existing literature to explore if this can be developed in Sadafa Hotel and Suites, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. This paper seeks to understand how the various local cuisines in the hotel make a difference in promoting gastronomy tourism in this part for the tourism industry. The findings will hopefully contribute to the limited literature on the subject to help tourism planners, government, policymakers, and other stakeholders approach gastronomy tourism in the area. Therefore, this paper tries to answer the following questions: How important are local cuisines to culinary tourism in Sadafa Hotel and Suites? What factors impede

promotion and what can be done to rectify them to promote gastronomy tourism?

Study Area

Nsukka is a prominent university town and a Local Government Area in Enugu State, Nigeria, which shares a common border as a town with Edem, Opi (archaeological site), Ede Oballa, and Obimo (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nsukka>). It is located at 6°51'24"N 7°23'45"E (6.8578300, 7.3957700) in Enugu State, Nigeria, with over a population of 309,633 people (en.wikipedia.org). It is positioned at the scenic Udi-Nsukka plateau at an elevation/elevation of 430m (1,410 ft) above sea level (en.wikipedia.org). The area is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo people and is historically significant as a centre of Igbo and intellectual life. To achieve the objectives of the study, the geographical scope is limited to Sadafa Hotel and Suites, which is one of the major standard tourist hotels recognised by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Enugu State. It is located at Akulue road Onuiyi, Nsukka.

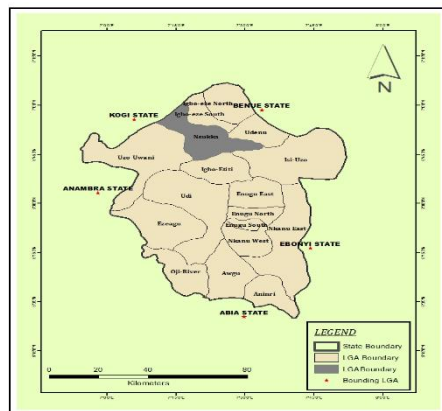


Fig 1: Map of Enugu State showing Nsukka

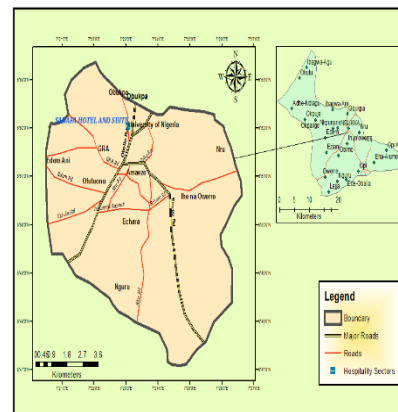


Fig 2: Map of Nsukka showing Sadafa hotel.

Source: Cartography unit, Department of Archaeology & Tourism, UNN.

Sadafa hotel and Suites was conceived following the need for a standard hospitality establishment, which Nsukka was lacking despite the rising profile of the city, and the need to ensure that business guests have a serene environment, comfortable rooms with proper amenities for a sleepover to consummate their business ideas. It came into existence on the 14th of February, 2021. The facility has taken into consideration all levels of clientele and their needs to ensure comfort during their stay in Nsukka.

Sadafa hotel can boast of direct employment of about 50 indigenous people and over 30 non-indigenous people. The hotel is considered as having

the ripple effect in enhancing capacity for other suppliers in the supply chain, especially in the poultry, fishery, and general goods sector. Sadafa hotel is an architectural edifice and one of the tallest buildings in Nsukka and presents one of the best bird's eye views of the city. The panoramic view is ecstatic and arousing while standing at the gallery bar.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research method to address the nature of the research problems and objectives as well as answer questions about ideas, experiences and meanings, including something that cannot be described numerically (McCombes, 2019). The research problem that prompted this study requires enquiries as qualitative research method is open-minded and exploratory in nature. The design also aids researchers in understanding the problem at hand through participants' lens or worldview in order to solve them (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). Consequently, participants were given the opportunity to share their views about turning local cuisines into the development of gastronomy tourism and how it can be enhanced and promoted. Therefore, the qualitative design was quite useful to this study owing to the fact that it works with the constructivism paradigm which argues that there is no single reality; rather, reality is socially constructed (Eyisi, Ololo, & Aruomah, 2022)

A case study involving ethnographic approach was adopted for this study because it entails a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organisation, or phenomenon. This approach is equally good for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding various aspects of research problem (McCombes, 2019). Hence, interviews were conducted with ten (10) participants who were willing and available to share their views and understanding about the topic of interest. Purposive sampling was chosen as the best sampling tool that suites this study. This type of sampling is often employed in qualitative research to allow the researchers to use their expertise in selecting a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the study. It is also used when the researchers want to gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population is very small and specific (Robinson, 2014).

Furthermore, thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data collected from the participants during the fieldwork. Thematic analysis is used to analyse data collected from interviews, or textual sources and also used to understand general themes in the data and how they are communicated (McCombes, 2019). It is used in making the data coherent to avoid losing sight of the relevant comments made during the interview.

Findings

Gastronomy is a sub segment of cultural tourism as well as an expressive way of knowing and celebrating the heritage, culture and traditions of people.

Findings from this study revealed that most people are not knowledgeable about what gastronomic or food tourism is all about, but after explanations, informants gained knowledge and their views were captured to understand the importance of gastronomy tourism development and the challenges that affects it in the Sadafa Hotel and Suites in Nsukka.. Whilst there is a challenge, there are also opportunities for its development in the study area. For the sake of anonymity, participants' real names were represented using pseudonyms. The themes that emerged were categorised into three and are presented in turns.

Theme one: Lacking appropriate skills and knowledge

The participants, whilst trying to understand the factors that impede the promotion local cuisines served in their hotels for gastronomy tourism, identified lack of skills and knowledge which are needed to retain visitors in the hotel.

The view of participant 2 is that “a major problem or challenge gastronomic tourism is currently facing is lack of skilled personnel”. That is, the hotel does not have the skilled people that know how to prepare major local dishes to taste in the hotel. She stated that, it has been a major challenge to them since being one of the chefs in the hotel. She further noted that the hotel prepares majorly one local dish which is *ofe-akwu* and no other person among the other chefs can prepare the other local dishes such as *ayaraya*, *echicha* among others that are well known in the city of Nsukka. It is, therefore, a big challenge because the guests often go elsewhere to eat these special foods and this may over time affect customer loyalty and revisit intention, the comfort and serenity of the hotel and its environment notwithstanding.

Another participant quipped that, the hotel needs people that understand the concept of gastronomy to be able to bridge the gap and communicate it both to members of staff of the hotel as well as to customers and visitors (participant 7, Sadafa hotel, Nsukka). She further explained thus: “Knowledge is key, if I don't know how to relate with them in the language they understand, we would lose them, both the revenue they will generate, the marketing and recognition it will bring to us” (participant 7, Sadafa hotel).

Participant 4 attested to the fact that, without people to prepare these special delicacies, ‘I won't be eating here again’. There is no doubt that when people that know how to prepare these local foods are employed here, people with plenty money will start to come, the prices would be increased. So, there will be increase in prices of food, both raw and cooked, and this will be a great challenge to people. If the influx of visitors is not properly managed, it will lead to over-subscription and there won't be enough rooms for all the guests, particularly during festivities (participant 4, Sadafa hotel, Nsukka).

Another issue that bothered participants about the prospects of gastronomy tourism in the study area was lack of effective communication skills to provide requisite information on local cuisines. Many African

societies, including Nigeria, lack the professional personnel to communicate appropriately to people about food tourism. Participant 5 understood this basic skill when he highlighted that:

Language and communication is a big barrier to gastronomic tourism in the hotel. For instance, we found it difficult to communicate with one of our foreign visitors on a business trip who asked for a particular local dish that he tasted in his first visit to Nigeria. Since we do not have dual or multiple language speakers and expertise on food tourism, we couldn't do anything to assist him. Furthermore, there is little or no effort to put together standard local food production and preparation procedures in Nigeria generally, neither have we made efforts to train staff on the subject. I believe that this is also a great challenge.

Furthermore, information obtained from participant 6 revealed that accessibility has been a great challenge to the development of gastronomic tourism in the hotel. The road leading to the hotel is very bad and impedes movement particularly during the rainy season. If these challenges are properly addressed, the opportunities for the hotel to promote this form of tourism will be quite enormous, including national recognition, partnership with gastronomic enthusiast and the tourism industry, and revenue generation (participant 5), while other opportunities can be social media influence, promotion and more patronage, too (participant 4).

Theme two: Boosting image and sharing bonds

Data collected from the participants showed that local cuisines enhance the image of the hotel or destination visited and create a lasting bond among the people. A participant noted that food tourism will help in boosting destination image. He further stated that it builds relationship between the people that prepare the food, the people eat it and the destination or community that serve the cuisine. My knowledge of food tourism comes from the many travels I made both as a child with my late philanthropist father and currently as a business man. So, gastronomy is both an attraction on its own and equally draws people to it if greatly developed. He also has this to say:

I can say that food tourism helps you see and know things you have not seen and may probably not know in your life time unless you travel to the destination. It breaks your perceptions about places, and people, that is, a feeling of prejudice and makes you see the world differently from a perspective of nature and beauty; the beauty of plants, ingredients and spices (participant 1, Sadafal hotel and Suites, Nsukka).

Food tourism is a generator of great income and revenue both to the hotel, the local community, small businesses and the

tourism industry at large. With the little influx of people into the hotel just for one of the local dishes prepared within its environs, it has generated a high amount for the hotel not to talk more of when the dishes are pre-planned and targeted at tourists and other local dishes are prepared alongside it. You can see it will cause this hotel to be known and attract greater number of visitors to it. Because when visitors are satisfied with what they eat and tend to let others know about it and where they have eaten it, it brings in more influx of visitors to that region or place. This gastronomy tourism you are talking about will be developed in that area (participant 3, Sada hotel and Suites, Nsukka).

Similar to the comments already made by these participants above, participant 4 also quipped that local cuisines give the hotel, its staff and the destination at large a vision and focus to know what they ought to do at any given time and how to meet the needs of its visitors. The participant said that it serves as a medium for peace, unity and interaction among the staff of the hotel, as it entails sharing different ideas among them on different ways of preparing dishes, while creating a good learning and entertaining environment. Another participant comments that such cuisines together with the way they are served will attract a greater number of tourists or visitors to the destination and determine a visitor's length of stay in the hotel. For instance, a visitor extended his stay because of one of the local Stews (ofe-akwu) he enjoyed in the hotel. So, gastronomy can affect destination choice and length of stay (participant 7, Sadafa hotel and Suites, Nsukka). He further stated that:

people accept you more when you eat what they eat or accept their food, so food tourism creates love and bond for people of different tribes and doesn't make you look like a rival or a foe to them but a friend. I can add that gastronomic tourism produces and adds colour to a destination.

For participant 2, "'food is who we are, whoever eats our food would love to learn about us and that entails our culture'. So, food tourism will help our people love and see the need of preparing the local dish and promote its preservation. So food serves as a source of preserving the culture of a people and its destination. Through this means also, people will be more interested in learning these dishes, become inquisitive in knowing about the people and pass the knowledge down from generation to generation. It is also important because it will advertise not just the hotel but the destination at large and bring in media influence which will cause a great shift in the history of the hotel. Therefore, eating the local cuisine of your host is always the highlight of every travel. Enugu, like other states in Igboland and Nigeria, have some local food that are originally their own as indicated below. Participant 3 added that food tourism can equally impact local economy including other related businesses

**Plate 1: Ayaraya oka****Plate 2: Echicha****Plate 3: Okpa****Plate 4: Ayaraji**

Furthermore, the importance of food tourism cannot be over-emphasized as participant 8 also said that gastronomy will serve as a great source of entertainment. He noted that it will help engage the youths in the destination and serve as a source of competition and employment to unemployed youths. He aptly quipped: 'Finally, let me see what will engage the youths of this land, especially our daughters, who no longer know how to cook our local dishes and are after the white man's food'.

The submissions of these participants show that gastronomy tourism will actually be a welcome development in Nsukka because of its capacity to introduce their local cuisines to the world at large and encourage the youth, staff and visitors to appreciate their culture. Food will not only enhance the image of the hotel but also establish bonds among people. This is quite interesting to know what food is able to do in our society.

Theme three: Bridging the gap for sustainability

This theme provides the understanding of participants on how the local cuisines in the hotel can be sustained for gastronomy tourism in the near future. Participant 8 averred that for gastronomic tourism to be sustained, the hotel must begin to see the need to incorporate these various local dishes into their menu. This will help avoid losing guests and potential guests to other hotels. She also noted that there is a need for the government to be involved in this because it is a huge project that should not be handled alone by the hotel. Furthermore, participant 9, highlighted the need for regular staff training. She also laid emphasis on customer awareness which she referred to as the various provisions the hotel has put in place in letting her guests know about her local cuisines, educate them about the importance of gastronomy and encourage them to make responsible choices during their stay.

On his part, participant 10 mentioned that the social media is a powerful tool for sustaining the gastronomic experience of a destination. He asserted that community engagement is also crucial. He noted that the concept of gastronomy tourism, which helps to market and showcase local cuisines in hotels and even destinations especially in this part of Enugu, will be a game changer for the promotion of Nsukka foods to the entire world. The positive outcomes of culinary tourism promotion will outweigh the negative effects on our hotel if managed properly. That said, sustaining them will be a collective effort that will enable the future generations appreciate what we have.

Discussion

This study examined the importance of turning local cuisines into gastronomy tourism using Sadafa Hotel and Suites, Nsukka as a case study. The findings of the paper revealed that the local dishes can impact gastronomy tourism in the area although it is not evident at the moment. The themes identified reflect lack of appropriate skills and knowledge, boosting the image of the destination and sharing bonds, and bridging the gap for sustainability as significant indicators that should be addressed to achieve gastronomy tourism in the study area.

Lack of appropriate skill to cater to and serve the tourists or visitors can hamper the development of gastronomy tourism as stated in the findings of this study. This fact is supported by Bakare (2014) who highlighted inappropriate skills that hinder gastronomy tourism to include inadequate understanding of food, food scent, food composition, availability, and food presentation. Age, tour status, nationality, race, educational attainment, social standing, health status, are also part of it. This observation is consistent with the points made by Nwokorie (2015) about food safety and lack of innovativeness being caused by lack of skills for food tourism development. Also, there is lack of innovation and product development in the food processing sector due to inadequate artisan skills. Local food processing establishments (at tourist centres, roadside cafeteria and eateries) have not been able to diversify product range because of lack of technical know-how and expertise in new product development (Offiong, 2011). Not being able to communicate well by providing information on the availability of foods can also be attributed to lack of skills and knowledge. This implies that providing trainings and hands-on training are crucial to the success of gastronomy tourism including employing or checking for educational backgrounds.

Concerning boosting the image and sharing bonds among the people, the study showed that gastronomy is of great value to a destination. It helps in boosting destination image, since it is both an attraction on its own and what draws people together in a destination if greatly developed (Caliskan, 2013). This type of tourism is considered to be very crucial as it makes tourists' trip a very unique and memorable one, helps a destination to shine and get a good reputation among others, whilst showing that food and beverages

consumption can have symbolic meanings besides serving just a physiological need. Iriguler (2017) supports this fact when he explained that gastronomy tourism promotes food festivals that are centred on luring visitors to sample foods and beverages that are native to a given geographical area. It is also stated by Henderson (2009) that local food is a crucial attraction for tourists and a significant factor for the tourist experience and bonding.

It is significant to note that food alone should not be the only thing attracting people to a particular destination, but rather, a combination of products, including good infrastructures, hospitality, image, culture etc. This finding resonates with Guruge (2020) who argued that although food is the main motivation for visiting a destination in gastronomic tourism, food alone is not sufficient to create a brand image of the destination. Williams (2014) averred that a destination should not be appealing only from a food perspective, it should also have good infrastructure, organisation, local hospitality and marketing. Hence, gastronomic tourism will function properly when other provision of infrastructure and other support services are made available.

Based on the research finds, it can be deduced that tourism is a core generator of revenue both for the hotel, the local community, small scale businesses and the tourism industry at large. This view is supported by Back (2021) who asserted that the impact of food tourism can be beneficial to the growth of a local economy. This observation resonates with Nesterchuk, et al (2021) who also noted that gastronomy tourism helps to revitalize and diversify tourism and contribute to local economic development because it includes various professional sectors - manufacturers, chefs, food, markets, travel and hospitality businesses and related business organisations.

As reflected in the findings, participants revealed that 'food is who we are, whoever eats our food would love to learn about us and that encompasses our culture'. This finding resonates with gastronomy tourism as a significant factor that is portrays the culture of destinations (Kim et al 2009; Hillel et al 2013). Thus, this dimension of gastronomy attracts tourists who are motivated to learn about different cultures through local food and beverages (Kumar, 2019). Usually, local food is related to the culture of the place. For example, tourists can be introduced to foods served to the monarch and queen of a country or consumed during unique festivals (Said, 2023). Food will always be an important aspect of culture and people's lives. It reflects their history, story, lifestyle, attitudes as well as traditions. Bakare, (2014) also noted that in terms of ethnicity, food no longer just provides nutrition but also enables social, cultural, and political connections with others. In sum, it reveals and solidifies social bond and connects people with their core heritage and being, thereby enhancing the image of the place.

Bridging the gap for sustainability entails providing various ways in which gastronomy tourism can be sustained. As reflected in the findings of the research, incorporating local cuisines in the menu, government involvement,

regular staff training, as well as using social media platforms in marketing the local dishes available are all crucial for sustaining culinary tourism in Sadafa Hotel and Suites, Nsukka. These assertions showed that local foods constitute a part of local sustainable development paradigms due to its multifaceted activity that connects the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability (Diaconescu, 2016). This implies that working together with the local governments and communities as well as implementing laws will reduce the chance of losing regional delicacies (Tibere & Aloysius, 2013).

Social media influence or word of mouth feedback can also contribute to sustaining food tourism in Sadafa Hotel and Suites. This is quite true because social media is a vast internet network that connects millions of people together and that can promote the gastronomic features of a destination. For instance, when pictures of these cuisines are taken and posted on social media by some celebrities or media influencers, people and even their followers get inquisitive about it and savour to have a taste. Additionally, positive feedback or reviews from persons that tasted the local foods can also influence potential visitors and in further boost the gastronomic features of the destination, directly or indirectly.

Conclusion

The intent to use food as a unique destination attraction for tourism has gained prominence around the world in recent years. This unique concept has been described using different terms such as culinary tourism, food tourism, cuisine tourism and gastronomic tourism. Food is often a representation of a culture's history, traditions, and values, thus, people can explore and appreciate the diverse flavors' and culinary practices of various cultures. Culinary tourism has become a significant contributor to the global economy. From the literature reviewed, many regions and cities are known for their unique dishes and food cultures, which attract tourists who want to experience authentic local cuisines.

This study will provide ideas that lead to the growth of restaurants, food markets, and other culinary-related businesses, generating revenue and employment opportunities. Also, the world of gastronomy has given rise to a plethora of food writers, critics, bloggers, and journalists who share their insights, experiences, and reviews related to food. This study will greatly contribute to the creation of cookbooks, food magazines, cooking shows, and online platforms dedicated to discussing and celebrating food. Observing why personal skills and knowledge can contribute to proper and efficient service to visitors and potential customers is crucial to maintaining professional standard and developing this unique type of tourism. Providing structured training and mentorship to refine their skills and gain a deeper understanding of culinary techniques and traditions will ensure how best to relate to guests. It is understood that this type of tourism has the capacity to boost the image of a destination as well as encourage bonding among people of different races,

tribes, age ranges, as well as societal recognition. Additionally, being cognizant of the various ways by which gastronomy tourism can be sustained in the study area is also necessary for preserving traditions and heritage of the people, ensuring that food history is not lost due to globalisation.

Having said all this, the findings of this study may not be generalised due to its limited scope and participants, and also because what obtain in other hotels in the same state or elsewhere may differ. However, the findings could be helpful to hoteliers and other tourism stakeholders in formulating policies that are implementable for the development of gastronomy tourism in the state. The discussion section contributes and advocates for gastronomy tourism exposition within other states in Nigeria and Africa at large. Since this study was aimed at promoting local cuisines through gastronomy tourism, other studies should go further to explore training within the hospitality industry for efficient and effective output. In all, gastronomy goes beyond just cooking and eating; it also influences cultural exchange, tourism, art, science, and community connections. Its contributions have enriched human experiences and continue to shape the way we approach food.

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