

Exploring the Impact of Tourist Motivations on Thailand's Gastronomic Tourism: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of tourist motivations on Thailand's appeal as a gastronomic tourism destination, addressing a gap in the existing literature by examining the specific factors that attract tourists to the country's culinary offerings. The primary research objective is to identify and analyze the motivations driving tourists to choose Thailand as a gastronomic destination, while also assessing the implications of these motivations for tourism stakeholders. Data was collected from 163 valid participants who had experiences with Thailand's gastronomic tourism. Using a combination of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, this study identifies four distinct factors that contribute to tourism motivation in Thailand: social interaction with novelty, relaxation, regression, and escape from boredom. Structural equation modeling is then employed to analyze the relationships between these factors and Thailand's appeal as a gastronomic tourism destination. The results indicate that social interaction with novelty, regression, and escape from boredom have a significant positive effect on Thailand's gastronomic destination, while relaxation is found to have no significant impact. These findings challenge existing assumptions about the role of relaxation in tourists' destination choices and provide valuable insights for tourism stakeholders seeking to capitalize on the growing popularity of gastronomic tourism. This research contributes to the understanding of gastronomic tourism motivations in Thailand, offering valuable insights for tourism stakeholders and paving the way for further exploration and understanding of the factors driving tourists' destination choices in the context of gastronomic tourism.

Keywords: Thailand tourism; Food tourism; Gastronomic tourism destination; Factor analysis; Structural equation model.

1. Introduction

Gastronomic tourism is called tasteful travel, because culinary pleasures sometimes best help to understand the culture of a particular people or nation (Seyitoğlu, 2021). The local gastronomy has become one of the highlights of the travel experience and destination appeal generator (Carvalho et al., 2021).

Gastronomic tourism has developed rapidly and has become one of the most dynamic and creative parts of the tourism industry (Gheorghie et al., 2014). With the

intensification of tourism competition and market competition, each region is looking for unique products, and gastronomic tourism is a new development trend in recent years (Li & Du, 2021). Gastronomic has been regarded as a vital element of tourism experiences because it can form an important destination image by influencing the tourist's destination choice or decision-making (Wu et al., 2023).

Chinese tourist market is the most significant international tourism markets of Thailand (Diao et al., 2023; Yasami et al., 2021). There are many factors influencing

Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as a tourist destination (Teng, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023). Destinations and concerned business operators should have a profound knowledge of different tourist segments, both those who are motivated mainly to explore cultural or gastronomic experience and those who are mainly motivated to visit the destination for other reasons (Cunha et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2022).

As a destination for Chinese tourists traveling abroad, Thailand has paid more and more attention to scientific research in recent years (Li et al., 2023; Z. Li et al., 2021). Topics such as tourist satisfaction, destination intention, residents' perception, and cultural tourism are particularly prominent (Luo et al., 2022). As one of the leading tourism products, gastronomic tourism in Thailand is gradually becoming a market (Prasongthan & Silpsrikul, 2022). With the development of Thai gastronomic streets, the promotion of gastronomic tourism policies, and the comparison of gastronomic tourism in different regions, the sustainable development of Thai gastronomic tourism services has become the main topic and has achieved many results (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Although there are many studies on the behavior of Chinese tourists to Thailand, there are few discussions based on gastronomy research, and motivation, as an important psychological factor of tourism, rarely appears in the discussion of existing research. Therefore, this research attempts to construct a structural equation model of the impact of tourism motivation on Thailand as a tourist destination for Chinese tourists through quantitative research.

Gastronomic identities of Thailand among Chinese tourists of different motivations should be uncovered as well as the discrepancies between the governments' intended and the realized images in the market (Lai et al., 2022). To strategically capitalize on Thai cuisine's appeal to the Chinese tourist market, it is essential to examine the influence of Chinese tourists. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the following question:

(1) By exploring factor analysis, what factors can explain the motivation of travelling in Thailand as the Gastronomic tourism.

(2) How motivation of travelling affects the Thailand as the gastronomic tourism.

(3) To implicate the stakeholders, such as marketers, government, and tourists.

2. Literature review

This paper attempt to uncover the motivation affecting the Chinese tourists choosing Thailand as the gastronomic destination (Zong & Fukushige, 2023). Thus, Tourism motivation theory has successfully helped to construct relevant hypotheses in this study (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Travel motivation is divided into four categories: psychological, spiritual, physical, and economical (Liutikas, 2017). Tourism motivation is the psychological driving force for people's tourism behavior and is also an essential factor affecting the choice of tourist destinations (Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2021). Tourism push and pull theory also pay great attention to tourism motivation (T. Li et al., 2021).

Driving factors refer to the internal factors that promote tourism desire, and pull factors refer to the factors that affect where tourists travel (Lin & Zhang, 2021). Therefore, tourism motivation is one of the results of the push-pull theory in theoretical research (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). To some extent, this problem is also a branch of tourism decision-making in the theory of tourist behavior (Wang et al., 2019). Through exploration factor analysis, this study attempts to determine the influence of different tourism motivation factors on Chinese tourists' choice of Thailand as a gastronomic tourism destination and constructs a Thai gastronomic tourism model (Praesri et al., 2022). Hence, the next section will review gastronomic tourism, tourism motivation, and the choice of Thailand as a gastronomic tourism destination.

Gastronomic tourism is an interdisciplinary concept that requires several disciplines to thoroughly understand ranging

from anthropology, sociology, management, marketing, and even linguistics (Phi & Dredge, 2019). Anthropological understanding of the concepts that concerns mainly with culture, identity, ethnicity, history, symbolism and the likes need to be embraced in order to develop gastronomic tourism products, create desirable destination image, and market the destinations and offerings to the right market segments (Lalicic et al., 2021). Studies on gastronomic tourism usually involves with identification of the segments and their behaviors, lifestyles, personality traits, destination image, destination branding and consumer which are similar to the approach adopted by this particular studies (Ketter & Avraham, 2021).

Gastronomic tourism helps destinations leap away from mainstream leisure market which is characterized by high competition, high price pressures, and less responsible visit behaviors by attracting alternative segments, cultural tourists (van Riel et al., 2021). However, the success of development of gastronomic tourism depends very much on several factors and orchestrated efforts from all stakeholders including farmers, local trades, tourism and hospitality providers, and governmental entities (Kumar & Kumar Singh, 2022). It is advised that destinations develop gastronomic tourism market in addition to the already pursued markets to pave the way towards sustainable development (Wan et al., 2022). As gastronomy is an element of culture which is characterized by the dynamic, complex, and exclusive nature, local gastronomic tourism needs constantly redefined (Everett, 2019).

2.1 Tourism Motivation in Gastronomic Tourism Activities

Motivation refers to an individuals' willingness to sacrifice their respective limited resources (money, time, efforts, social cost) to achieve intended goal and the origin of their actions. Tourists are pushed to take some actions to reduce the felt tension arisen from the difference between the actual and desired states (Font & Hindley, 2017). Therefore, motivation deserves a great deal of discussion. While gastronomic tourists might be principally motivated to travel

because of their interest in food and the food ways of the region, others might be motivated to visit the region for other reasons yet still participate in the gastronomic activities (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). It can be argued, then, that for gastronomic tourists, the gastronomy-related motivation is the leading motivation for their travel and hence, govern the destination choice process (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). The motivation to explore other culture through gastronomy might be secondary for other tourists who are driven to visit a destination for other reasons (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020).

Whether the tourists are principally or secondarily motivated to participate in local gastronomic experiences, their motivation concerns beyond the mere consumption of local food but more towards cultural experience, especially gastronomic and cultural tourists (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Their motivation to participate in food scene might also include education, sensory gratification, interpersonal relations, and health and skill development (Davis et al., 2021).

To satisfy their interpersonal relationship needs, the tourists also seek to relate with locals in the authentic traditional settings where real practices of the locals are highly valued as they would allow the tourists to immerse themselves in the genuine cultural settings (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). Tourists are motivated to participate in local gastronomic scene when they see health benefits associated with the ingredients or cooking methods (Park et al., 2022). Highlighting health benefits of the local ingredients, production or cooking practices also lend a good selling point for these tourists as well (Kumar & Smith, 2018).

Although these tourists look for authentic gastronomic experience of the local culture of the destinations, sensory gratification that is associated with food taste, consumption contexts, and other attributes of the experience should be regarded physically pleasant while provoking the sense of excitement in this group of serious devotees (cultural and gastronomic tourists). Destination marketing organizations and tourism business operators should, hence ensure that both the

marketing communication materials and user generated contents to be shared on social media look indulging and novel from the perspective of their targeted segment (Sharma et al., 2020). This point reiterates the importance of tourists' insight.

2.2 Choosing Thailand as a gastronomic tourism destination

Chinese gastronomic tourists refers to Chinese mainland citizens who are mainly motivated to travel abroad by their quests to learn about gastronomies of other countries through food and food ways (Suntikul et al., 2020). As participation in a thorough gastronomic experiences of Thailand requires them to depart from their familiar norms of food consumption in aspects of ingredients, cooking methods, and consumption patterns, they tend to perceive less risks associated with immersing themselves in a foreign and unknown cultural contexts, tasting foreign and exotic ingredients, and socializing with people of completely different norms (Lin et al., 2019). Therefore, they tend to belong to young adulthood, early and mid-working age cohorts, better educated, and familiar with foreign travel planning and arrangements.

Gastronomies in Thailand, high exposure to information about the mentioned topics, their higher than normal cultural product consumption capital, and international travel experience, Chinese prospective cultural and gastronomic tourists tend to be knowledgeable about cultures and gastronomies as well as abroad travel arrangements (Park et al., 2022). They look for genuine in gastronomic experiences from alternative destinations by looking for gastronomic attributes that are beyond the food taste but presentation, genuinely local production of food produces, ingredients, and food stuff, historical and economical relevance of the gastronomic tourism experience to local communities and other idiosyncrasies (Fusté-Forné & Mundet i Cerdan, 2021).

Therefore, Chinese gastronomic and cultural tourists engage in two steps. Since the beginning of the destination choice task, Chinese gastronomic tourists form their consideration set by including destinations that meet the

predetermined levels of non-compensatory rules while being perceived as having an authentic gastronomic and cultural experiences (Li et al., 2017). The final choice is made using lexographic rules where the final destination is made on the basis that it performs best among other destinations in most (Karaliopoulos et al., 2017).

3. Methods

The survey aims to uncover the realized Chinese tourists of different travel motivations affecting the choosing Thailand as the gastronomic destination. 163 questionnaires were distributed, and all was returned. Two questionnaires were incomplete and, hence, taken out from the analysis making 98% of return rate.

The travel motivation part adopts the push and pull factors proposed by Subadra (2019). Information source importance are adopted from the instruments used in the study of Kerdpitak (2022). The items measuring a destination's gastronomic image are adopted from the instruments used in the works of Yasami et al. (2021). All items are adapted to suit the context of the present studies. To measure the choosing Thailand as a gastronomic tourism destination, this research adopted in the work of Jeaheng and Han (2020). The measurement of these items will be on a 5 points Likert-type scale.

Table 1 describes the participants' information. Participants aged 20-50 accounted for the majority, more than 93.3%. Among them, people aged 31-40 were the most. This group was the leading consumer group in the tourism market. Participants with bachelor's degrees have an absolute advantage (62%), and there is a certain number of participants with bachelor's degrees or above, which means that the degree may have a specific screening effect. The participation groups from urban areas are relatively significant, accounting for 61.3%, and the participants from metropolitan communities are not a minority. Therefore, the population participating in the survey is mainly the urban population.

The groups with 3501 ¥-10000 ¥ disposable income are

beautiful in the participation, with 3501 ¥ -6000 ¥ disposable ¥ groups accounting for 33.7%. Therefore, their disposable income groups accounting for 39.3% and 6001 ¥ -10000 ¥ income will likely affect their travel behavior.

Table 4-13. The Descriptive Statistics of respondents

| Measure | Items | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Age | 20-30years old | 42 | 25.8% |
| | 31-40 years old | 66 | 40.5% |
| | 41-50 years old | 44 | 27.0% |
| | 51-60 years old | 9 | 5.5% |
| | 61-70 years old | 2 | 1.2% |
| | Without degree | 28 | 17.2% |
| | Bachelor’s Degree | 101 | 62.0% |
| | Master’s Degree | 29 | 17.8% |
| Urbanization | Doctorate Degrees | 5 | 3.1% |
| | Cosmopolitan community | 43 | 26.4% |
| | Urban area | 100 | 61.3% |
| | Suburban area | 12 | 7.4% |
| Disposable Income | Rural area | 8 | 4.9% |
| | Less than 3,500 ¥ | 20 | 12.3% |
| | 3,501-6000 ¥ | 64 | 39.3% |
| | 6,001-10,000 ¥ | 55 | 33.7% |
| | 10,001 – 15,000 ¥ | 19 | 11.7% |
| | 15,001 ¥ and higher | 5 | 3.1% |

4. Data analysis and results

Alpha of each sub dimension of the scale is greater than 0.6,

4.1 Explanatory factors analysis

indicating that the reliability of the scale is good. Mean of Inter

Travel motivation comprising 9 sub-variables. All variable Cronbach’s Alpha is greater than 0.70 critical acceptable value (Manning & Munro, 2007), Cronbach’s

Item Correlations is greater than 0.3. As shown in table 2

Table 2. Validity results of pilot study for the respondents’ travel motivation

| Variables | Subscales | Items | Item-Total Correlation | Mean of Inter-Item Correlations | Cronbach’s Alpha | KMO | Bartlett's Test | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-------|--------------------|----|------|
| | | | | | | | Approx. Chi-Square | df | Sig. |
| Travel | Escape from | Q1-1 | 0.661 | 0.490 | 0.742 | 0.638 | 125.167 | 3 | .000 |
| Motivation (Push Factors) | Mundane | Q1-2 | 0.450 | | | | | | |
| | Environment | Q1-3 | 0.606 | | | | | | |
| | Exploration | Q1-4 | 0.733 | 0.483 | 0.823 | 0.806 | 283.984 | 10 | .000 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|----|------|
| of Self | Q1-5 | 0.603 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-6 | 0.551 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-7 | 0.526 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-8 | 0.682 | | | | | | |
| Relaxation | Q1-9 | 0.584 | 0.446 | 0.702 | 0.658 | 91.165 | 3 | .000 |
| | Q1-10 | 0.476 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-11 | 0.506 | | | | | | |
| Relaxation | Q1-12 | 0.617 | 0.480 | 0.732 | 0.670 | 105.713 | 3 | .000 |
| | Q1-13 | 0.517 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-14 | 0.544 | | | | | | |
| Regression | Q1-15 | 0.624 | 0.495 | 0.750 | 0.620 | 136.022 | 3 | .000 |
| | Q1-16 | 0.697 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-17 | 0.438 | | | | | | |
| Enhancement of Kinship | Q1-18 | 0.597 | 0.542 | 0.780 | 0.700 | 133.935 | 3 | .000 |
| | Q1-19 | 0.610 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-20 | 0.647 | | | | | | |
| Novelty | Q1-21 | 0.730 | 0.505 | 0.832 | 0.831 | 297.404 | 10 | .000 |
| | Q1-22 | 0.560 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-23 | 0.615 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-24 | 0.579 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-25 | 0.696 | | | | | | |
| Social | Q1-26 | 0.574 | 0.518 | 0.762 | 0.671 | 126.603 | 3 | .000 |
| Interaction | Q1-27 | 0.544 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-28 | 0.667 | | | | | | |
| Education | Q1-29 | 0.703 | 0.542 | 0.892 | 0.842 | 592.438 | 21 | .000 |
| | Q1-30 | 0.716 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-31 | 0.677 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-32 | 0.648 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-33 | 0.703 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-34 | 0.689 | | | | | | |
| | Q1-35 | 0.690 | | | | | | |

In the validity analysis of the scale (Escape from Mundane Environment, Exploration of Self, Relaxation, Prestige, Regression, Enhancement of Kinship, Novelty, Social Interaction, Social Interaction). The KMO value are 0.638, 0.806, 0.658, 0.670, 0.620, 0.700, 0.831, 0.671, 0.842, which is

greater than the 0.6 level. The significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is less than 0.05, indicating that the scale has good validity.

The validity of 1-35 items is analyzed by SPSS, table 3 introduces the scale of the respondents' travel motivation and

the Cronbach $\alpha=0.974$ (>0.9). Therefore, the reliable quality of the research data is very high.

Table 3. The reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized | |
|------------------|---|------------|
| | Items | N of Items |
| .974 | .975 | 35 |

The CITC values of the analysis items are all greater than 0.4, indicating a good correlation between the analysis items and that the reliability level is good. To sum up, the reliability coefficient value of the research data is higher than 0.9, which comprehensively shows that the data reliability is of high quality and can be used for further analysis.

Table 4. The KMO and Bartlett's Test

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | .948 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square |
| | 4684.087 |
| | df |
| | 595 |
| | Sig. |
| | .000 |

Table 4 shows that $KMO=0.948$ (>0.9) meets the prerequisite requirements of factor analysis, which means that the data can be used for factor analysis. Furthermore, the data passed Bartlett's sphericity test ($p<0.05$), indicating that the study data is suitable for factor analysis.

Use all items in part one (all items measuring 9 sub-variables) and they can extract 4 factors, as shown in table 5.

TABLE 5. Rotated Component Matrix^a of the respondents' travel motivation

| Items | Component | | | | Extraction |
|--|-----------|-------|-------|----|------------|
| | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | |
| Q1- 26: I wish I get some new friends when on vacation | 0.761 | | | | 0.748 |
| Q1- 10: I indulge myself during the vacation | 0.743 | | | | 0.69 |
| Q1- 6: On vacation, I am free to do what I feel like to | 0.731 | | | | 0.743 |
| Q1- 18: I feel closer to my friends and family when on vacation | 0.731 | | | | 0.642 |
| Q1- 2: Vacation allows me to go to somewhere different and do something new | 0.716 | | | | 0.556 |
| Q1- 30: When travelling, I always want to learn local cultures and lifestyles | 0.696 | | | | 0.733 |
| Q1- 34: When travelling, I always look forward to visiting historically important places | 0.674 | | | | 0.656 |
| Q1- 22: Visiting new places thrills me | 0.667 | | | | 0.579 |
| Q1- 31: Local food and lifestyles at the destination always thrills me | | 0.649 | | | 0.658 |
| Q1- 35: When travelling, I always look forward to visit beautiful scenery | | 0.634 | | | 0.625 |
| Q1- 9: Being on vacation allows me to relax physically | | 0.627 | | | 0.591 |
| Q1- 17: I hope to recharge myself after vacation | | 0.612 | | | 0.664 |
| Q1- 15: I tend to forget all the problems at home on vacation | | | 0.777 | | 0.747 |
| Q1- 24: I enjoy rough things on vacation | | | 0.767 | | 0.63 |
| Q1- 16: I can be away from all the problems when I am on vacation | | | 0.730 | | 0.598 |

| | | |
|--|-------|-------|
| Q1- 1: I would like to take a vacation to escape from my boring life | 0.732 | 0.667 |
| Q1- 3: My life is so boring, I need to take a vacation | 0.731 | 0.655 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

After 11 rotations, the study removed the factor load below 0.6, so, Q1-8, Q1-14, Q1-25, Q1-13, Q1-33, Q1-29, Q1-11, Q1-4, Q1-5, Q1-27, Q1-28, Q1-20, Q1-23, Q1-19,1-12, Q1-7, Q1-32, Q1-21 will be removed in the questionnaire, after which the study determined that tourist motivation included four factors.

Factor 1 can be explained by Q1-26, Q1-10, Q1-6, Q1-18, Q1-2, Q1-30, Q1-34, Q1-22, containing a total of 8 questions. The study named factor 1 as social interaction with novelty (SIN), which refers to the expectation of tourists to acquire new friends, new attractions, new cultures and lifestyles through tourism, so as to improve their social communication and communication skills.

Factor 2 can be explained by Q1-31, Q1-35, Q1-9, and Q1-17, consisting of four topics. According to the topic, factor 2 is relaxing, which refers to tourists who relax (RE) themselves by changing the scenery, food and lifestyle during the tour, and even after the tour.

Factor 3 can be explained by three questions, including Q1-15, Q1-24, and Q1-16. According to the topic information, factor 3 can be defined as regression (REG), which means that tourists can have the opportunity to escape from social and family problems when they travel.

Factor 4 contains Q1-1 and Q1-3. Factor 4 is escape from boring (EFB), refers to tourists traveling to escape the boredom in life and get a new way of life.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained for the scale of travel motivation

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| F1 | 18.893 | 53.980 | 53.980 | 18.893 | 53.980 | 53.980 | 7.621 | 21.775 | 21.775 |
| F2 | 2.021 | 5.774 | 59.755 | 2.021 | 5.774 | 59.755 | 7.089 | 20.254 | 42.029 |
| F3 | 1.159 | 3.312 | 63.066 | 1.159 | 3.312 | 63.066 | 5.440 | 15.543 | 57.572 |
| F4 | 1.058 | 3.022 | 66.088 | 1.058 | 3.022 | 66.088 | 2.981 | 8.516 | 66.088 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6 explains that four factors are extracted from factor analysis, and the characteristic root value is greater than 1. The variance interpretation rate of these four factors after rotation is 21.706%, 20.296%, 15.615%, and 8.471%, and the cumulative variance interpretation rate after rotation is 66.088%. This result means that the factor extraction is successful.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

In confirmatory factor analysis, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) serve as evaluation criteria for convergent validity. Convergent validity is deemed satisfactory when the CR value for each factor exceeds 0.7 and the AVE value surpasses 0.50. The criterion for establishing discriminant validity entails that the

square root of each factor's AVE is greater than the correlation coefficient between the given factor and other factors.

As indicated by the convergent validity (Table 7) and discriminant validity (Table 8) tables, all latent variables possess AVE values exceeding 0.5, and their CR indices meet the required standard. However, Table 9 reveals that model-fit indices, including the GFI=0.669 (<0.9), AGFI=0.668 (<0.9), NFI=0.758 (<0.9), CFI=0.871 (<0.9), have not attained the desired standard. Figure 1 depicts the results of the confirmatory factor analysis before adjustment.

Table 7. Convergent validity test

| Latent variables | Observed variables | Factor loading | CR | AVE |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------|-------|
| SIN | SIN1 | 0.844 | 0.939 | 0.659 |
| | SIN2 | 0.864 | | |
| | SIN3 | 0.788 | | |
| | SIN4 | 0.756 | | |
| | SIN5 | 0.805 | | |
| | SIN6 | 0.817 | | |
| | SIN7 | 0.804 | | |
| | SIN8 | 0.814 | | |
| RE | RE1 | 0.726 | 0.856 | 0.598 |
| | RE2 | 0.752 | | |
| | RE3 | 0.821 | | |
| | RE4 | 0.791 | | |
| REG | REG1 | 0.892 | 0.896 | 0.745 |
| | REG2 | 0.703 | | |
| | REG3 | 0.972 | | |
| EFB | EFB1 | 0.827 | 0.787 | 0.650 |
| | EFB2 | 0.784 | | |
| TGT | TGT1 | 0.749 | 0.976 | 0.582 |
| | TGT2 | 0.752 | | |
| | TGT3 | 0.745 | | |
| | TGT4 | 0.805 | | |
| | TGT5 | 0.683 | | |
| | TGT6 | 0.773 | | |

| | |
|-------|-------|
| TGT7 | 0.743 |
| TGT8 | 0.797 |
| TGT9 | 0.781 |
| TGT10 | 0.776 |
| TGT11 | 0.764 |
| TGT12 | 0.786 |
| TGT13 | 0.712 |
| TGT14 | 0.738 |
| TGT15 | 0.792 |
| TGT16 | 0.804 |
| TGT17 | 0.708 |
| TGT18 | 0.758 |
| TGT19 | 0.775 |
| TGT20 | 0.776 |
| TGT21 | 0.750 |
| TGT22 | 0.739 |
| TGT23 | 0.760 |
| TGT24 | 0.753 |
| TGT25 | 0.775 |
| TGT26 | 0.779 |
| TGT27 | 0.732 |
| TGT28 | 0.788 |
| TGT29 | 0.807 |

Table 8. Discriminant validity test

| Latent Variable | SIN | RE | REG | EFB | JW |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| SIN | 0.812 | | | | |
| RE | 0.842 | 0.773 | | | |
| REG | 0.424 | 0.472 | 0.863 | | |
| EFB | 0.666 | 0.791 | 0.516 | 0.806 | |
| JW | 0.821 | 0.829 | 0.566 | 0.738 | 0.763 |

Note: The diagonal is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE

The research examines the output results of Modification Indices, with Table 10 organizing the MI values in descending order. It reveals that the items SIN1, SIN3, RE1, TGT1, TGT2, TGT6, TGT7, TGT8, TGT10, TGT11, TGT12, TGT13, TGT15, TGT16, TGT17, TGT18, TGT19, TGT20, TGT21, TGT22, TGT23, TGT26, TGT27, TGT28, and TGT29, corresponding to residuals e1, e3, e9, e18, e19, e23, e24, e25, e27, e28, e29, e30, e32, e33, e34, e35, e36, e37, e38, e39, e40, e43, e44, e45, and e46, have high MI values. Consequently, these 25 items were removed to optimize the model fit.

Following the removal of these items, the confirmatory factor analysis fit index has significantly improved. Table 9 shows that the fit indices of GFI=0.901 (>0.9), AGFI=0.872 (>0.85), and NFI=0.916 (>0.9) have reached the

recommended standards, with $\chi^2/df=1.172$ (<1.844) and RMSEA=0.033 (<0.072). Table 11 indicates that, in terms of convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) value for each variable ranges between 0.564 and 0.744, all of which exceed the 0.5 standard. The composite reliability (CR) values lie between 0.789 and 0.920, all above the 0.7 threshold, suggesting that convergent validity is reliable. Table 12 reveals that the absolute value of the correlation coefficient between any two factors is smaller than the square root of the corresponding factor's AVE, implying that there is a discernible degree of discrimination between the four factors under investigation. Thus, the discriminant validity of the scale, after removing the items, is reliable.

Table 9. Confirmatory factor model fit metrics

| Fit index | χ^2/df | RMSEA | GFI | AGFI | NFI | TLI | CFI |
|-----------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Standards | <3 | <0.08 | >0.9 | >0.85 | >0.9 | >0.9 | >0.9 |
| Result | Before revising | 1.844 | 0.072 | 0.699 | 0.668 | 0.758 | 0.864 |
| | After revising | 1.172 | 0.033 | 0.901 | 0.872 | 0.916 | 0.984 |

Table 10. Modification indices

| | | M.I. | Par Change |
|-----|------|------|------------|
| e45 | <--> | EFB | 6.657 |
| e45 | <--> | e46 | 6.411 |
| e44 | <--> | REG | 6.373 |
| e43 | <--> | e45 | 5.317 |
| e43 | <--> | e44 | 5.439 |
| e42 | <--> | e43 | 7.912 |
| e41 | <--> | e42 | 4.295 |
| e39 | <--> | REG | 6.106 |
| e39 | <--> | SIN | 7.751 |
| e39 | <--> | e40 | 7.656 |
| e37 | <--> | EFB | 4.433 |
| e37 | <--> | e45 | 12.354 |
| e37 | <--> | e38 | 4.074 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------|-----|--------|--------|
| e36 | <--> | SIN | 4.236 | -0.055 |
| e36 | <--> | e44 | 6.301 | 0.092 |
| e35 | <--> | TGT | 6.14 | -0.046 |
| e35 | <--> | REG | 5.742 | 0.109 |
| e35 | <--> | SIN | 13.766 | 0.1 |
| e35 | <--> | e42 | 4.225 | -0.06 |
| e35 | <--> | e36 | 27.562 | -0.184 |
| e34 | <--> | EFB | 7.948 | -0.098 |
| e34 | <--> | e37 | 11.501 | -0.11 |
| e33 | <--> | e36 | 7.138 | -0.084 |
| e33 | <--> | e34 | 4.661 | -0.068 |
| e32 | <--> | e40 | 7.144 | 0.082 |
| e32 | <--> | e37 | 4.279 | 0.06 |
| e31 | <--> | e40 | 11.652 | -0.121 |
| e31 | <--> | e32 | 29.184 | -0.18 |
| e30 | <--> | e43 | 4.011 | -0.072 |
| e30 | <--> | e40 | 6.103 | 0.083 |
| e30 | <--> | e39 | 7.647 | -0.1 |
| e30 | <--> | e36 | 4.87 | -0.077 |
| e30 | <--> | e35 | 7.698 | 0.098 |
| e30 | <--> | e31 | 4.989 | -0.083 |
| e29 | <--> | REG | 7.577 | 0.118 |
| e29 | <--> | e38 | 6.952 | -0.088 |
| e28 | <--> | e36 | 8.258 | 0.105 |
| e28 | <--> | e33 | 14.779 | 0.125 |
| e27 | <--> | SIN | 4.14 | 0.054 |
| e27 | <--> | e40 | 13.847 | -0.123 |
| e27 | <--> | e36 | 7.346 | -0.093 |
| e27 | <--> | e35 | 13.263 | 0.126 |
| e27 | <--> | e33 | 5.874 | 0.075 |
| e27 | <--> | e28 | 12.68 | -0.127 |
| e26 | <--> | e38 | 5.124 | 0.068 |
| e26 | <--> | e27 | 5.956 | -0.072 |
| e25 | <--> | e39 | 4.471 | -0.07 |
| e25 | <--> | e26 | 6.484 | -0.07 |
| e24 | <--> | EFB | 4.706 | 0.078 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------|-----|--------|--------|
| e24 | <--> | e44 | 5.203 | 0.088 |
| e24 | <--> | e40 | 13.112 | 0.128 |
| e24 | <--> | e36 | 4.927 | 0.081 |
| e24 | <--> | e33 | 8.625 | -0.096 |
| e24 | <--> | e32 | 5.585 | 0.079 |
| e24 | <--> | e28 | 4.346 | -0.08 |
| e24 | <--> | e27 | 5.635 | -0.086 |
| e23 | <--> | e38 | 7.583 | 0.094 |
| e23 | <--> | e33 | 9.796 | 0.095 |
| e23 | <--> | e24 | 7.209 | -0.096 |
| e22 | <--> | e38 | 4.623 | 0.073 |
| e22 | <--> | e37 | 4.043 | -0.063 |
| e22 | <--> | e33 | 4.208 | -0.062 |
| e22 | <--> | e30 | 8.463 | 0.099 |
| e21 | <--> | e45 | 4.713 | -0.058 |
| e21 | <--> | e36 | 9.133 | -0.089 |
| e21 | <--> | e33 | 5.824 | 0.063 |
| e20 | <--> | e25 | 9.293 | 0.103 |
| e19 | <--> | TGT | 4.294 | -0.04 |
| e19 | <--> | SIN | 8.113 | 0.079 |
| e19 | <--> | e28 | 6.756 | -0.098 |
| e19 | <--> | e22 | 4.656 | 0.076 |
| e19 | <--> | e20 | 7.353 | -0.104 |
| e18 | <--> | e42 | 4.221 | 0.055 |
| e18 | <--> | e37 | 4.802 | -0.065 |
| e18 | <--> | e34 | 6.952 | 0.086 |
| e17 | <--> | e38 | 5.57 | -0.097 |
| e17 | <--> | e30 | 4.038 | -0.083 |
| e16 | <--> | e37 | 4.523 | 0.07 |
| e16 | <--> | e27 | 5.77 | -0.085 |
| e16 | <--> | e23 | 4.636 | -0.075 |
| e15 | <--> | e44 | 5.9 | -0.067 |
| e15 | <--> | e40 | 4.785 | -0.055 |
| e15 | <--> | e17 | 6.563 | -0.079 |
| e14 | <--> | TGT | 13.992 | 0.087 |
| e14 | <--> | REG | 8.022 | -0.159 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------|-----|--------|--------|
| e14 | <--> | e44 | 4.195 | 0.093 |
| e14 | <--> | e34 | 5.822 | 0.106 |
| e14 | <--> | e23 | 5.943 | 0.103 |
| e14 | <--> | e18 | 5.446 | -0.093 |
| e14 | <--> | e17 | 5.938 | 0.124 |
| e13 | <--> | e40 | 8.491 | 0.084 |
| e13 | <--> | e38 | 4.278 | -0.062 |
| e13 | <--> | e29 | 4.284 | 0.058 |
| e13 | <--> | e14 | 5.915 | -0.089 |
| e12 | <--> | e40 | 4.183 | -0.064 |
| e12 | <--> | e32 | 4.535 | -0.063 |
| e11 | <--> | e26 | 4.787 | 0.057 |
| e9 | <--> | TGT | 7.354 | 0.05 |
| e9 | <--> | RE | 5.333 | -0.047 |
| e9 | <--> | e44 | 8.836 | 0.109 |
| e9 | <--> | e40 | 6.117 | 0.083 |
| e9 | <--> | e37 | 5.997 | 0.078 |
| e9 | <--> | e32 | 10.134 | 0.101 |
| e9 | <--> | e31 | 8.906 | -0.11 |
| e9 | <--> | e30 | 5.783 | 0.084 |
| e9 | <--> | e23 | 4.446 | -0.072 |
| e9 | <--> | e13 | 4.482 | 0.063 |
| e8 | <--> | e45 | 4.112 | -0.06 |
| e8 | <--> | e44 | 4.59 | 0.074 |
| e8 | <--> | e21 | 5.862 | -0.066 |
| e8 | <--> | e12 | 5.111 | 0.069 |
| e7 | <--> | e25 | 6.805 | -0.077 |
| e6 | <--> | e46 | 5.883 | -0.064 |
| e6 | <--> | e24 | 5.417 | -0.08 |
| e6 | <--> | e9 | 4.37 | -0.069 |
| e5 | <--> | e43 | 4.109 | 0.067 |
| e4 | <--> | e38 | 5.078 | -0.076 |
| e4 | <--> | e26 | 4.752 | -0.063 |
| e3 | <--> | EFB | 6.593 | 0.082 |
| e3 | <--> | e37 | 4.63 | 0.064 |
| e3 | <--> | e25 | 5.239 | 0.068 |

| | | | | |
|----|------|-----|-------|--------|
| e3 | <--> | e16 | 7.393 | 0.09 |
| e3 | <--> | e10 | 4.074 | -0.066 |
| e3 | <--> | e8 | 4.073 | 0.061 |
| e2 | <--> | TGT | 7.91 | -0.044 |
| e2 | <--> | SIN | 7.909 | 0.062 |
| e2 | <--> | e41 | 4.453 | 0.06 |
| e2 | <--> | e39 | 4.053 | 0.061 |
| e2 | <--> | e37 | 6.696 | -0.07 |
| e1 | <--> | e21 | 9.427 | 0.081 |
| e1 | <--> | e7 | 5.933 | 0.07 |

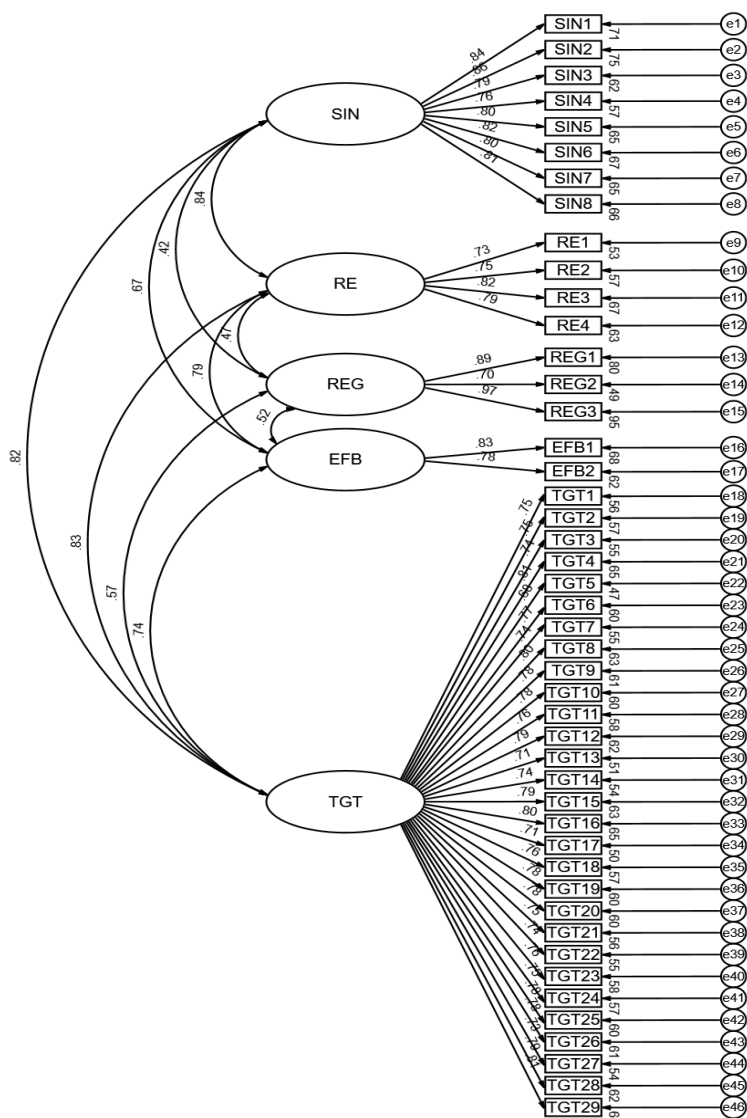


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis results (before model-fitting)

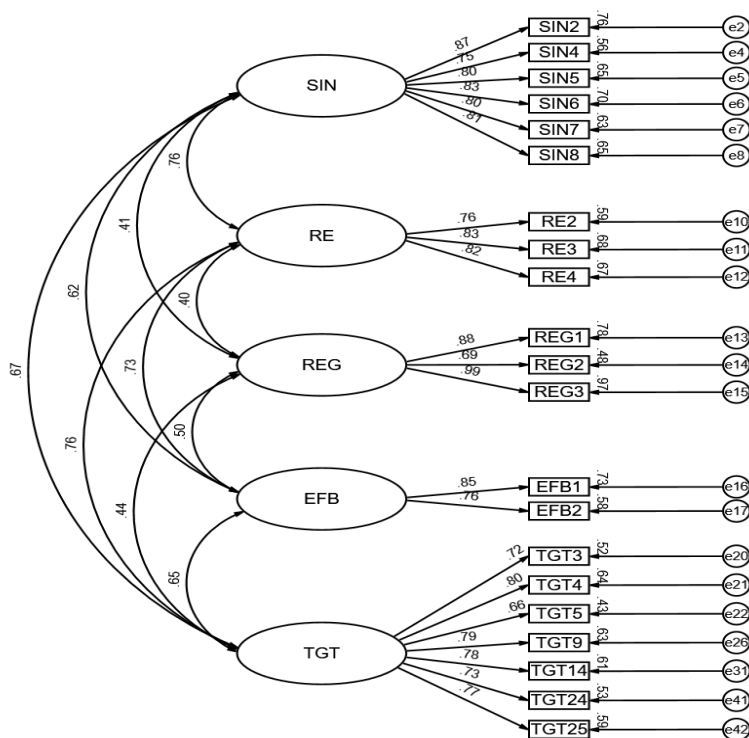


Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results (after model-fitting)

Table 11. Convergent validity test (after deleting items)

| Latent variables | Observed variables | Factor loading | CR | AVE |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------|-------|
| SIN | SIN2 | 0.871 | 0.920 | 0.658 |
| | SIN4 | 0.749 | | |
| | SIN5 | 0.804 | | |
| | SIN6 | 0.834 | | |
| | SIN7 | 0.796 | | |
| | SIN8 | 0.806 | | |
| RE | RE2 | 0.765 | 0.845 | 0.646 |
| | RE3 | 0.826 | | |
| | RE4 | 0.819 | | |
| REG | REG1 | 0.882 | 0.895 | 0.744 |
| | REG2 | 0.695 | | |
| | REG3 | 0.986 | | |
| EFB | EFB1 | 0.853 | 0.789 | 0.653 |
| | EFB2 | 0.760 | | |
| TGT | TGT3 | 0.721 | 0.900 | 0.564 |
| | TGT4 | 0.802 | | |
| | TGT5 | 0.656 | | |
| | TGT9 | 0.633 | | |
| | TGT14 | 0.611 | | |

| | |
|-------|-------|
| TGT9 | 0.795 |
| TGT14 | 0.781 |
| TGT24 | 0.727 |
| TGT25 | 0.765 |

Table 12. Discriminant validity test (after deleting items)

| Latent variables | SIN | RE | REG | EFB | TGT |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| SIN | 0.811 | | | | |
| RE | 0.759 | 0.804 | | | |
| REG | 0.408 | 0.403 | 0.863 | | |
| EFB | 0.623 | 0.733 | 0.497 | 0.808 | |
| TGT | 0.673 | 0.765 | 0.436 | 0.647 | 0.751 |

Note: The diagonal is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE

4.3 Structural equation model

Table 13. Structural equation model path test

| Paths | Estimate | β | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---------|----------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| SIN→TGT | 0.384 | 0.452 | 0.096 | 4.011 | *** |
| RE→TGT | 0.201 | 0.201 | 0.142 | 1.419 | 0.156 |
| REG→TGT | 0.099 | 0.142 | 0.042 | 2.379 | 0.017 |
| EFB→TGT | 0.209 | 0.236 | 0.096 | 2.181 | 0.029 |

After establishing the structural equation model, the software computes the model fitting, yielding the estimated values of the detection path, standardized path coefficients, standard errors (S.E.), C.R. values, and significance (P) values. Generally, if the C.R. value exceeds 1.96 and the P value is less than 0.05, it can be inferred that the path coefficient

passes the significance test within the 95% confidence interval, indicating that the corresponding path assumption of the predefined model is established; otherwise, the assumption does not hold. Figure 3 uncovers the test results, and the detail as the following:

SIN has a significant positive effect on TGT ($\beta=0.452$, $p<0.001$).

The effects of RE on TGT does not hold ($\beta=0.201$, $p>0.05$).

REG has a significant positive effect on TGT ($\beta=0.142$, $p<0.05$).

The positive effect of EFB on TGT is significant ($\beta=0.236$, $p<0.05$).

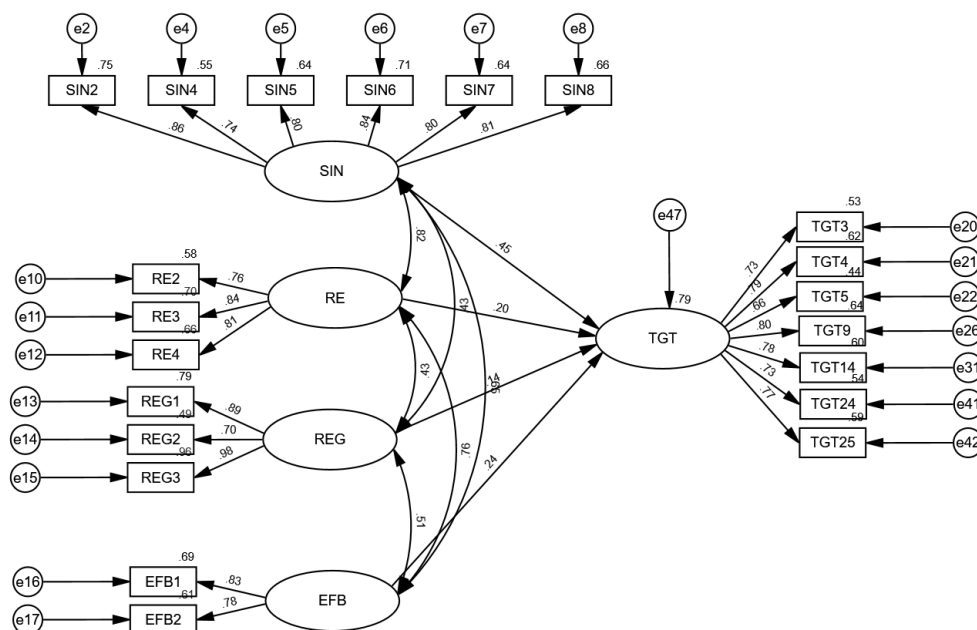


Figure 3. The structural equation model of travel motivation for Thailand as the Gastronomic tourism.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study examines the role of tourism motivation in shaping Thailand's appeal as a gastronomic tourism destination. Through exploratory factor analysis, it was found that tourism motivation encompasses four factors: social interaction with novelty, relaxation, regression, and escape from boredom. Subsequent confirmatory factor analysis led to the removal of items related to Thailand as a gourmet tourism destination. The resulting structural equation model demonstrated that social interaction with novelty, regression, and escape from boredom have significant positive effects on Thailand's standing as a gastronomic tourism destination, while relaxation appears to have no impact.

In comparison with previous studies, this research provides a more nuanced understanding of the motivations behind gastronomic tourism in Thailand. While earlier research primarily focused on general tourism motivations or the impact of food on tourist destinations (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019), this study delves deeper into the specific factors that contribute to Thailand's appeal as a gastronomic destination. This represents a theoretical innovation in the field, as it

highlights the importance of understanding tourist motivations on a more granular level to better cater to their needs and preferences.

The present study not only expands upon existing knowledge in the field of gastronomic tourism but also offers several notable theoretical breakthroughs and research discoveries compared to previous research.

A key contribution of this study lies in its in-depth examination of the specific motivations that drive tourists to choose Thailand as a gastronomic destination. Past research in the field of gastronomic tourism has often focused on general motivations for travel or broader aspects of food tourism, such as the role of food in destination marketing and tourists' food-related behavior (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Jeaheng & Han, 2020). This study moves beyond this general scope by identifying and analyzing the unique factors that make Thailand's culinary offerings particularly appealing to tourists.

In doing so, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between tourism motivation and destination appeal in the context of gastronomic tourism. By employing a combination of

exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, this study uncovers four distinct factors that contribute to tourism motivation in Thailand: social interaction with novelty, relaxation, regression, and escape from boredom. The identification of these factors represents a significant advancement in the field, as it enables a more targeted and effective approach to the development and promotion of gastronomic tourism experiences.

Moreover, the study's finding that relaxation does not have a significant impact on Thailand's appeal as a gastronomic destination challenges existing assumptions in the literature about the role of relaxation in tourists' destination choices. This discovery invites further exploration into the role of relaxation within the broader context of gastronomic tourism and underscores the importance of understanding the unique motivations and preferences of tourists in different destinations.

Combining both exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modeling. This robust approach allows for more accurate and reliable findings, which can contribute to the development of more effective strategies for tourism stakeholders. Furthermore, the methodological rigor of this study can serve as an example for future research in the field of gastronomic tourism.

Hence, the results provide valuable insights into the motivations driving tourists to choose Thailand as a gastronomic destination and offers several theoretical breakthroughs and research discoveries. By identifying the unique factors that contribute to Thailand's appeal as a gourmet tourism destination and challenging existing assumptions about the role of relaxation in destination choices, which makes a significant contribution to the field and paves the way for further exploration and understanding of gastronomic tourism.

Based on these findings, several implications can be drawn for stakeholders involved in Thailand's gastronomic tourism industry. Firstly, destination marketers and tourism operators

should emphasize the aspects of social interaction with novelty, regression, and escape from boredom in their promotional materials and experiences. This could involve designing immersive culinary events or food tours that foster social interactions and provide novel, authentic experiences for tourists, allowing them to escape the monotony of daily life.

Secondly, tourism planners and policymakers should recognize the importance of these factors and allocate resources accordingly to further develop and strengthen Thailand's gastronomic tourism offerings. This may entail investing in local culinary initiatives, training programs for hospitality professionals, and infrastructure improvements that facilitate memorable and unique gastronomic experiences for visitors.

Lastly, the research findings suggest that stakeholders should not overemphasize the relaxation aspect of gastronomic tourism, as it does not appear to be a significant driver for Thailand as a gourmet destination. However, it is essential not to neglect relaxation entirely, as it may still be an essential component of tourists' overall experience.

This study contributes to the understanding of tourism motivation in the context of gastronomic tourism and offers valuable insights for stakeholders in Thailand's tourism industry. By recognizing the significant factors shaping tourists' motivations and tailoring offerings to meet these needs, Thailand can further solidify its position as a premier gourmet tourism destination.

Despite the significant contributions of this study to the understanding of gastronomic tourism motivations in Thailand, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. These limitations not only provide context for the interpretation of the findings but also offer opportunities for future research directions.

Firstly, the sample size of this study is relatively small, with only 163 participants. While the results offer valuable insights into the motivations driving tourists to choose

Thailand as a gastronomic destination, a larger and more diverse sample would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future research could aim to increase the sample size and ensure that it is more representative of the broader population of tourists visiting Thailand for gastronomic experiences. This could involve targeting different age groups, nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the various motivations at play.

Secondly, this study focuses specifically on Thailand as a gastronomic tourism destination. Although this focus enables a detailed examination of the unique factors that contribute to Thailand's appeal, it also limits the applicability of the findings to other destinations. Future research could expand the scope of the investigation by comparing motivations across different countries or regions, which would provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences in tourists' preferences for various gastronomic destinations.

Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study presents another limitation, as it provides only a snapshot of tourists' motivations at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies could be conducted in future research to explore how motivations evolve over time or in response to changes in the gastronomic tourism landscape, such as the introduction of new culinary experiences or the impacts of socio-political events on the tourism industry.

Lastly, the study primarily employs quantitative methods to investigate the factors that influence tourists' motivations. While this approach allows for a robust analysis of the relationships between variables, it might not capture the full complexity of tourists' motivations and experiences. Future research could integrate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of the emotions, thoughts, and preferences that underpin tourists' decision-making processes.

In conclusion, despite the limitations of this study, it offers valuable insights into the motivations driving tourists to

choose Thailand as a gastronomic destination. By acknowledging these limitations and exploring the suggested future research directions, the field of gastronomic tourism can continue to expand its understanding of tourists' motivations and preferences, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective strategies for attracting and satisfying visitors to culinary destinations worldwide.

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