

The Potential of Food Tourism Development in Lianga, Surigao Del Sur

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ABSTRACT

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The study aims to assess the potential of food tourism development in Lianga, Surigao del Sur by evaluating the role of local food in tourism, determining the local food image from visitors' perspectives and ascertaining its relationship between their overall satisfactions. Also, it seeks to determine the relationship between food satisfaction and their overall behavioral intention of consuming local food. The study is conducted among the four leading food service establishments per records of the Municipal Tourism Office. Owners were interviewed using the survey questionnaire for tourism enterprise operators. The survey on industry marketers has presented the current role of local food in Lianga tourism industry. The general assessment revealed that the locality has a culinary experience to offer to its clientele as revealed in the findings. Thus, it can be noted that the food industry in Lianga can essentially contribute to the influx of the tourists in the area not only of their environmental and social experience but also with their gastronomic indulgence which brings to them a unique experience as a whole. The relationship between satisfaction and their behavioral intention patterns were also considered, and it was found out that visitors have positive views on their dining experience, and this can be optimized for local product and service improvements to intensify the market value of Lianga as a potential tourist destination taking pride on its culinary services.

Keywords: *food tourism, local food image, food satisfaction, behavioral intention*

I. INTRODUCTION

Philippines has variety of savory dishes and desserts which depict the rich historic culture of Filipinos and authenticity of the regions; thus, food tourism is now becoming an expanding sector in tourism industry. Indeed, the government efforts advocate on integrating the farmers and agriculture in tourism thus bannerling culinary and farm tourism to fully achieve the maximum potential of this sector to gain positive socio-economic impacts. It centers on the emphasis on promoting the country through food, hence food tourism.

Nowadays, one major factor for selecting and traveling to a certain tourist destination is food and food tourism. For tourists, eating out is a common activity and more and more are eager to try and explore local and traditional cuisines as they believe that food tells much about the people and the place (Shah and Shende, 2017). Apparently, many authors (Teller and Wall, 2000; and Kivela and Crofts, 2006) have supported the importance of food by tourists on holidays and trips and suggested that it may be also a prime reason why travelers visit a particular destination which consequently provides a prime contribution to the economy of such tourist destinations. In fact, in the research conducted by the World Food Travel Association, 93% of travelers have created sentimental and long-lasting memories from their experiences with the food and beverage in the area. The authentic local foods, culinary antiquity, and people culture embedded with much hospitality are the foundations of an area's attractive features that give inclined interest to both locals and visitors. Food can be a motive for a traveler searching for a remarkable experience and may be considered as a major factor, together with other factors, influencing the visit to a destination (Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen, 2017). Hence, related studies and literatures have mostly discussed about local food and food tourism as an effective marketing tool in improving tourism and how food played an important role in the development of tourism and tourist experiences. Food tourism has been defined and studied with varying perspectives stressing the importance of the interplay of food and tourism. Food tourism

doesn't mean only mean tourists eating gourmet meals and appetizing cuisines; instead, food tourists explore new and special restaurants or even try street foods for new and authentic culinary experiences. Thus, food tourism is not only about the type and kind of food that tourists eat but it is about the fact of going to a new place to try and find out new food experiences (Shah and Shende, 2017).

The current study aimed to assess the potential of food tourism development in the locality of Lianga, Surigao del Sur. Specifically, it aimed to evaluate the role of local food in tourism enterprise and identify its issues and concerns in the viability of developing food tourism. It also sought to evaluate the current local food image of local foods from tourists' perspectives and subsequently assessing food satisfaction. The behavioral intentions were also investigated in this assessment. A study of Du Rand, Heath and Albert (2003) indicated that local food holds much potential in enhancing tourism sustainability which contributes to the supplementary characteristics of a certain destination; strengthening their local economy; and establishing environment-friendly infrastructures. It also highlighted the utilization of local foods as a key or supplementary attraction.

Research Objectives

Sustainable tourism can be of most realizable through the utilization of local food while satisfying the customers, developing authenticity of a certain destination and proper handling of local food resources. The analysis on perceived food image and satisfaction is essential in evaluating tourists' behaviors to fully aid in the marketing aspect of food (Ab Karim, Lia and Salleh, 2010). Thus, the study sought to assess the potential of food tourism in Lianga, Surigao del Sur. Specifically, it intends to:

- a. Evaluate the role of local food in Lianga tourism.
- b. Assess the visitors' perception on current local food image.
- c. Identify visitor local food satisfaction.
- d. Measure the behavioral intentions of visitors on local foods.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive method of research using a survey questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire was adopted from related studies (Ab Karim, Lia and Salleh, 2011; Amira, 2009; Alberts, du Rand and Heath, 2008) and was modified to fit to the context of the study and was under validation by experts in the field and the academe. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed. One was a survey questionnaire for tourism enterprise operators to satisfy the first objective of the study. Another questionnaire was given to visitors availing food and beverage. For triangulation, an expert's opinion interview was also instituted.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relevant profile of tourism enterprises was gathered to provide background of the business on the food aspect. Restaurants under survey which operated for more than five years are availed by over 1,500 tourists. Most of the chefs and cooks preparing the food are all residents of Lianga. Meanwhile, kitchen staff employed are both locals in Lianga and from neighboring municipalities. Thus, it can be noted that culinary experiences in Lianga as availed by many tourists are offered mostly by the kitchen workforce who are locals in the municipality. Local chefs, together with local staff serve as major influencers and leaders in advocating local cuisine to the world and creating authentic culinary experience. Local foods offered on the menu can have imperative positive benefits for the local community and the area economy (Berno and Oliver 2016).

The current status of local food in these enterprises is less prioritized. They do not offer welcome food or drinks or outdoor activities. Currently, they source their raw ingredients and supplies more in the area and some in neighboring municipalities. These are supplied mostly by local fishermen and farmers and from selected suppliers of native meat and traders. Only little local delicacies are also available in their outlets. Further, other souvenirs are not offered in all enterprises.

In Lianga, though food service operators source from the locale, they still find it difficult to avail local products with the desired quality for their menu dishes. That is one of the reasons why cooks need to go to neighboring local markets. Conversely, they indicated the adequacy of the local fisherman to produce needed amount of seafoods to tourism enterprises for their local cuisines. However, operators' perceptions are divided on the sufficiency of the other local produce. Noting on one respondent's point on this, he said that local suppliers prefer to sell their catch and produce to bigger establishments or entities who are willing to pay for a higher price than the standard. For all

that, despite the recorded sufficiency, failing to provide quality should be a major concern for tourism enterprise management. These contrary information on the provision of local produce between the quality and quantity of products can be a major concern and must be addressed while developing food tourism in the area.

The insufficiency of local produce, the lack of available market outlet and the fact of being more expensive than import foods are some of the major constraints recognized by the operators in utilizing local food in their cuisines. Unavailability, accessibility and seasonality issues are also identified. Because of these issues and constraints, operators secure needed produce outside the locality. Even though the local food produce is more expensive than imported foods, they also believe that business could make use more of this since tourists are now very eager to discover local food experience especially on seafood authentic dishes. It can be noted that operators and tourists recognize the value of local food in culinary exploration in the locality.

Tourism enterprises understand the importance of local food in the food business and see a very positive effect in the promotion of their business images. Farm tour and buffet night are considered as special features of their businesses while other operators still plan to add a feature. Social media marketing, food displays, and word of mouth are utilized mostly as their marketing techniques in promoting their food. Marketing efforts like staff recommendations and palatable food presentations are also considered by some to create satisfying food experience to the tourists. Local food is very important to tourism enterprise management because it is their main product. It was advised by a food expert that before marketing local foods to visitors, the local community should be aware and fully appreciate the local bounties they have and understand the benefits of marketing local food and promoting it as a potential tourist attraction. In such manner, this would provide greater chance of successfully linking local food to tourism.

Meanwhile, the profile of the visitor-respondents entails that young professionals are observed to be more engaged in transitory tourist activities that could provide them relaxation from the hustle and bustle of work and to recharge their selves ready to take on the challenges at the workplace. Further, they are also interested in exploring local cuisine; which becomes an added attraction to Lianga, Surigao del Sur as a potential tourist destination of both local and foreign visitors.

Findings support the Theory of Tourist Gaze of Urry (2002) which postulates that tourists consume goods that generate for them pleasurable experience. According to the theory, many of the professionals support the theory because it allows them to break free from established routine allowing for a multisensory experience that provides them satisfaction.

Table 1 Tourists' Perception on Current Local Food Image

Factors	1 Strongly Agree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Factor 1: Food and Dining Atmosphere				
The food is well presented	2	2	142	61
It has quality food service	1	7	148	51
It has attractive eating surrounding		12	123	72
It is clean and safe to consume		7	135	65
Total	3	28	548	249
%	0%	3%	66%	30%
Factor 2: Features of Lianga Food				
It has varied of choices	3	9	112	83
It has variety of cooking methods	0	9	124	74
It has much information on local food	0	9	128	70
Eating outlets are easy to access	0	11	129	67

Total	3	38	493	294
%	0%	5%	60%	36%
Factor 3: Core Food Value				
The food adds to my visiting enjoyment	2	8	115	82
The food has value for money	1	11	141	54
The food has a reasonable price		14	128	65
The food in Lianga is delicious		7	125	75
Total	3	40	509	276
%	0%	5%	61%	33%
Factor 4: Local Food Uniqueness				
Food is authentic	1	9	132	65
Food is recognizable	0	4	145	58
Food is part of cultural heritage	0	7	137	63
It has a lot of local food specialties	0	7	133	67
Total	1	27	547	253
%	0%	3%	66%	31%
OVERALL %	0%	4%	63%	33%

Table 1 underscored the result for the tourists' perception on current local food image. It can be construed that in the context of environmental stimuli, the ambience which include presentation of food, quality of food service, attractive surroundings and cleanliness and safety create an effect-inducing medium that affect the entire sensory channels of the tourists. This implies that tourists agree that their gastronomic experience is influenced by the external stimuli such as the food and dining atmosphere. It can be further deduced that the atmosphere did not only include the environment but also the food-related stimuli such as food presentation. Findings on factor one is supported by Stroebele and Castro who assert that the desirability of food intake is influenced by the physical surroundings. This can also include the following: odor, temperature, food presentation and location. On Factor 2, the table reveals that most tourists agree with 67% percent for the responses. It further presents that in Lianga, Surigao del Sur, tourists enjoy their gastronomic experience because the municipality is swarmed with eating outlets with 177 responding on this benchmark statement. This only means that tourists do not have any problem when they explore the area because of the culinary abundance in the locality. Factor 3, on Core Food Value, table also reveals that the tourists have found value for their money because they find enjoyment in their culinary intake. However, for all the benchmark statements on the core food value, 68% agree that their food experience add to their visiting enjoyment. They also find the prices to be reasonable for the delicious food and delicacies available for intake. Factor 4 which pertains on local food uniqueness, 69% of the responses also agree that the food can easily be familiarize because it speaks of the cultural heritage of the place. Lianga abounds with seafood because there are numerous prawn and crab cultivator in the area. As to delicacies, rice sweets are also abundant.

In general, all these factors were given an overall 69% rating. They all agree on the four factors presented to be evident as part of the tourist experience; thus, with this end, there is a potential that Lianga can also extend its available culinary background to its local and foreign tourists. The visits in the area are also influenced with the dining experience of the visitors in the locality.

The factors and attributes used under this table is adopted form the relevant study of Ab. Karim, et.al.

Table 2: Local Food Satisfaction

Factors	1 Very Dissatisfied	2 Dissatisfied	3 Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied
Factor A: Dining Experience				
Food Presentation	0	6	132	69
Food Service	1	8	129	69
Eating Surroundings	0	11	130	66

Restaurant/Food Variety	0	6	145	56
Factor B: Accessibility Convenience in Lianga				
Accessibility to places	1	11	120	75
Variety of local eating places	1	9	136	61
Availability of local foods	2	7	133	65
Presence of Food Vendors	0	9	149	49
Factor C: Quality and Value of the Food				
Food Quality	0	3	131	73
Food variety	0	8	140	59
Food Prices	0	13	135	59
Meal Experience	1	6	147	53
Factor D: Food Tourism Products				
Lianga Culture on Food	1	11	132	63
Food Souvenirs	1	17	135	54
Food Information	0	17	138	52
Food Menus	1	14	141	51
OVERALL %	0%	5%	66%	29%

Table 2 indicates the four primordial factors that contribute to the satisfaction of tourists on the local food available in Lianga, Surigao del Sur. It can be noted from the table that on dining atmosphere, tourists' satisfaction is influenced by the variety of food and restaurant available in the locality. It can further be construed that the culinary relevance that contribute to the gastronomic joy of the tourists both local and foreign also add to the overall sensorial experience that the tourists feel when they visit the municipality as part of their tourist destination. Furthermore, on accessibility convenience in Lianga, it can be noted that food marts are strategically and conveniently located because of the presence of the food vendors. This makes their experience more enjoyable because of these food services which can be found almost everywhere within the municipality selling local delicacies and other locally made recipes. Conversely, they also enjoy the food because of the experience they have. As articulated in one of the interview responses, the food preparations and menus that they have for their gastronomic experience contributed for their meal experience. Thus, the menus that the tourists find in the locality are considered also as food tourism products together with other products like souvenir items. In general, 72% agree that food tourism products are available in the locality. Most of these are culinary products that also add to the entire stay of the tourist in the area.

Table 3 Behavioral Intentions of Food Consumption

Intentions	Mean
I have the intention of returning to Lianga to savor the food.	3.44
I will give a positive recommendation of the food/culinary experience in Lianga to my family/friends.	3.40
I would like to try other types of local food in Lianga.	3.42
I consider Lianga to be on my list of food destinations.	3.37
I would continue to come to Lianga even if the prices of the food were higher.	3.29
I will encourage my family/friends to come to visit Lianga (based on food experience)	3.42
I will highly recommend food in Lianga to others.	3.39

Based on Table 3, it can be construed that the visitors would like to visit Lianga as a potential tourist destination even if the prices in the tourism commodities will escalate. This only implies that the entire experience which include their stay and their food experience have a positive effect on the behavioral intentions of the food consumption of the local and foreign tourists who visit the locality. This is followed by their positive recommendations to their friends and family members. They will intentionally include their dining experience in the recommendation as reflected in their responses. This only connotes that the food industry is part of the

determining factor in the satisfaction of the guests. It can be further understood that tourism is a multidimensional nature which involves not only the perceptual senses but the other sensorial experiences of the tourists that will develop strong behavioral intentions that can make them appreciate their entire travel experience; and, in this study, food consumption is one determining factor. This is also supported by the study of Yuksel and Yuksel who noted that satisfaction of tourists depends not only in the environment but also with other consumable products such as food.

Table 4 Regression Analysis of Local Food Image and Food Satisfaction

The regression equation is $\text{food satisfaction} = 2.48 + 0.232 \text{ local food image}$					
Predictor	Coef	SE Coef	T	P	
Constant	2.483	1.087	2.28	0.039	
local fo	0.2316	0.3317	0.70	0.496	
S = 0.05191 R-Sq = 3.4% R-Sq(adj) = 0.0%					
Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Regression	1	0.001315	0.001315	0.49	0.496
Residual Error	14	0.037729	0.002695		
Total	15	0.039044			

Table 4 presents that there is no relationship between the perception of the visitors towards the local food image and their overall food satisfaction. Thus, it can be implied that satisfaction of a visitor can be directly predicted through the image of the food it perceives.

Table 5 Regression Analysis of Food Satisfaction and Behavioral Intention

The regression equation is $\text{gen. satisfaction} = - 1.02 + 1.25 \text{ behavioral intention}$					
Predictor	Coef	SE Coef	T	P	
Constant	-1.0223	0.8132	-1.26	0.336	
behavior	1.2523	0.2386	5.25	0.034	
S = 0.01234 R-Sq = 93.2% R-Sq(adj) = 89.8%					
Analysis of Variance					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Regression	1	0.0041953	0.0041953	27.54	0.034
Residual Error	2	0.0003047	0.0001523		
Total	3	0.0045000			

Table 5 shows the regression analysis on food satisfaction of the visitors towards their behavioral intention to consume such food again. It signifies the relationship between the two variables. Thus, visitors who are fully satisfied by the local food in Lianga are more likely intending to avail and consume the food again on their next visit. The finding is also in consonance with the study of Ab. Karim, et.al which showed a strong relationship of the tourists' satisfaction and intention to revisit again.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study which is descriptive in nature endeavored to assess the potentials of Lianga, Surigao del Sur on Food Tourism. General assessment revealed that the locality has a culinary experience to offer to its clientele as revealed in the findings. Thus, it can be noted that the food industry in Lianga can essentially contribute to the influx of the tourists in the area not only of their environmental and social experience, but also with their gastronomic indulgence which brings to them a unique experience as a whole. The behavioral intention patterns of the tourists were considered, and it was found out that the visitors have positive views on their dining experience, and this can

be optimized for service improvements to intensify the market value of Lianga as a potential tourist destination taking pride on its culinary services. Further, with respect to enterprise operators and food service providers, it is suggested to give trainings to the food vendors and those involved on the food industry in the locality as to the aspect of customer satisfaction so that they can better enhance their services which can also influence the behavioral intentions of the tourists as a whole. Also, they need to put extra efforts to create and promote owned specialty '*local food product*' sourcing from local producers and growers thus creating authentic culinary experiences for visitors. As such, development of a specific identification system which includes criteria for local food identity and characteristics for branding and packaging identity, as recommended in the study Du Rand, et.al. (2010), be incorporated to entail great empowerment of these enterprises to establish remarkable food and beverage services and produce own local *pasalubong* products through the utilization of locally produced foods.

It is strongly recommended that these analyses will be considered as an input for the tourism plans for the municipality. In developing an effective tourist marketing for the locality, it is also vital that the local government unit together with the Department of Tourism will take into account the different services including the food industry of the locality as a potential contributor to the marketability of the area in the aspect of tourism. In such manner, development of destination marketing strategies should be undertaken while considering food as another potential tourist attraction. As such, local foods produced in each barangay should be identified and be integrated in the development and promotion of local cuisines to ensure sustainability. With these, the government should also consider various recommendations from the experts like the establishment of local farmer's markets which will be considered as hub where local fishermen and farmers can display their produce and harvests at the same time provide purchasing convenience to food service providers. To boost marketing strategies on tourism in the municipality, it is therefore suggested that the local government will provide marketing channels to highlight and promote various tourist attractions found in the locality. This might include the production of brochures displayed in all recognized tourism enterprises made available for all tourists. It is also recommended that operators, with the Municipal Tourism Office, should initiate and establish a food-related organization that will serve as avenue for all owners and operators to assess the current demands of the visitors and develop strategies to upgrade services and boost food industry and tourism.

Implications for further research

This research has contributed to the endeavor on analyzing food tourism potentials in a locality with the major considerations of the following: the role of local food in the Lianga tourism, the perceived local food image, overall satisfaction and their behavioral intentions to consume food in the locality again. The results of the research suggest future researches on the topic. The researcher recommends to conduct a local food inventory in the twenty-one barangays in the municipality. This will provide a baseline data on the available locally grown products that have high potentials for food development. The capacity of the local growers and producers in planning for food tourism must also be considered in future studies to consider the producer's capacity and promote sustainability. Moreover, perception of the local residents on linking local food to tourism should be considered at the same time assessing their level of understanding on food tourism and the benefits they can get from the development. This information will pronounce their attitude and support towards food tourism development which is crucial in the success of any tourism development plan.

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