

Gastronomic Tourism: Factors that Affect Tourists' Satisfaction in Penang's Food and Beverage Industry During the Post Covid-19 Pandemic Era

Nur Husnina Sahrulrazi¹, Mas Affandy Mashuri², Teku Zariff Zaeimoedin³, Johanudin Lahap⁴, Noraslinda Mohd Said⁵, Fadhlina Mahat⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Email: ¹nienahusnina18@gmail.com, ³tekuzariff@uitm.edu.my, ⁴johanudin785@uitm.edu.my, ⁵noraslinda698@uitm.edu.my, ⁶fadhlina563@uitm.edu.my
Corresponding Authors Email: mas2036@uitm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i11/23584> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i11/23584

Published Date: 09 November 2024

Abstract

Gastronomy tourism refers to journeys to specific locations where local food and beverages are the primary motivators for travel, with the aim of tasting specific foods (typically local). This current study intended to investigate the factors that influence tourists' satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage industry during the post Covid-19 pandemic era. It also intended to determine the relationship between service quality, travel destination, and memorable experiences with tourists' satisfaction. Data collection was via an online survey (Google form) involving 384 respondents identified using a judgmental sampling approach. Findings indicate that all the hypotheses are supported. A strong positive linear relationship between the variables and tourists' satisfaction was also found. Finally, gastronomy tourists travelling to Penang were satisfied with the service provided in Penang, it was a peaceful tourist destination and had provided memorable experiences. Therefore, these findings indicate that the food and beverage industry in Penang has a positive impact on gastronomy tourists.

Keywords: Gastronomic Tourism, Tourist, Tourist Satisfaction, Cultural Tourism, Food and Beverage Industry, Post Pandemic Covid-19

Introduction

Gastronomy tourism refers to a journey to a specific locations where local food and beverages are the primary motivators for travelling, with the aim of tasting specific foods (typically local)

(Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). Culinary tourism tends to form the bulk of domestic tourism activity, with tourists visiting certain eateries, usually selling local foods. One example is Malaysia, where there are innumerable food and beverage entrepreneurs because Malaysia is a rich potpourri of various ethnic and cultural heritage, thus, dishing out various types of food, be it heritage or contemporary food.

Eateries usually try to provide the best culinary experiences they can to travellers (Testa et al., 2019). Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a major focal point in urban tourism, spanning a variety of topics. It includes food events that serve as tourist attractions, restaurant and beverage themed streets or districts, catering food options to a wide range of tourist preferences and demands, and branding towns or geographical areas according to certain foodies. According to the World Tourism Organization's Global Report on Food Tourism, the average tourist spends around a third of their vacation expenditure on food and beverage (EREN, 2019). The tourism industry was one of the world's largest markets prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as a result of the pandemic, all worldwide destinations had implemented travel restrictions beginning in March 2020, barring their borders to tourists and suspending international flights (Neuburger & Egger, 2020).

Gastronomy ensures the conservation of humans using the best food possible. There are several components in gastronomic tourism, beginning with a new food experience. According to Antón et al (2019), the emphasis has evolved away from traditional "must-see" physical attractions and moved towards "must-experience" tourism activities, in which tourists may discover, engage, and learn about daily local life. Lončarić et al (2021), opined that today's travellers are looking for unique and "once-on-a-lifetime" travel experiences. Gastronomic tourism is also a component of tourism. Food and cuisines are important elements of a destination's intangible heritage since they exhibit national cultural elements and local characteristics that can be enhanced to build an established brand (Mohamed et al., 2019). Moreover, tourists can delve into and learn more about the culture and food traditions of a location since each country certainly has its own culture and food traditions. Socialization is also a component of gastronomic tourism and it is defined as the process of appreciating the norms and ideologies of society. As commonly known, socialization has played a crucial role in human civilization since ancient times. Therefore, gastronomic tourism is pertinent to human beings and elucidates public opinion about the culture, way of life, and food traditions of a particular place.

Covid-19 was a new pandemic that initially emerged in China in December 2019 and had rapidly spread all over the world via human-to-human transmission. Most nations throughout the world had imposed short-term travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the infection, raising concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the global tourism industry (Mertens et al., 2020). When visiting a destination, tourists desire an all-inclusive travel packages, as well as safety and protection. They want to avoid hazards and crowded tourist places, and may decide not to travel if their preferred destination affects their well-being due to the epidemic (Wen et al., 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic had caused significant alarm in the travel industry, particularly in the culinary tourism sector. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2020), the tourism sector had declined tremendously due to the outbreak. The global crisis had worsened, and the COVID-19 pandemic had

threatened the emotional stability of international tourists. The pandemic had a significant impact on travel risk and tourist management perspectives.

The problem statement is that visitors are apprehensive about traveling (Das & Tiwari, 2020). Hence, the Malaysian food and beverage industry, particularly in Penang, was stagnating due to a lack of tourists (Jeyacheya & Hampton, 2020). In addition, the government had established standard operating procedures (SOPs) that must be adhered to by tourists (Awan et al., 2020). As a consequence of this pandemic, the possibility of local food outlets to promote Penang's unique food and culture to local tourists from neighbouring states was limited (Abhari et al., 2021). A prior study had examined how COVID-19 had caused a shortage in food supplies among local tourists. However, it just examined the shortage of local tourists who wanted to visit historical sites, not to experience culinary products. Hence, this study decided to focus more on the food and beverage industry in Penang.

Literature Review

Overview of the importance of Gastronomic Tourism in Malaysia

Gastronomic tourism provides a glimpse about the history, culture, and environment of a region by enriching the experience by reflecting on a "location", which in this case is "Penang, Malaysia" (Zhang et al., 2019). A large percentage of travellers consider eating and food as their main activities throughout their trip. Gastronomic tourism can be a useful tool for enhancing economic, health and sustainability, cultural showcases, as well as preservation and promotion of local cuisine. Gastronomic tourism attracts food enthusiasts and travellers, thus, contributing significantly to the local economy. High-profile food festivals and culinary tours can boost revenue for restaurants, food markets, and local producers. In terms of employment opportunities, the growth of gastronomic tourism creates jobs in various sectors, including hospitality, food production, and culinary education, which benefits local communities and enhance skill development. Whereas, in terms of health and sustainability, the motivation to adopt a healthy diet can be achieved by exposing people to a variety of traditional foods, many of which are healthy. It can also raise awareness of the advantages of eating a healthy diet.

In line with worldwide trends towards eco-friendly tourism, gastronomic tourism frequently encourages sustainable practices, including farm-to-table dining and the use of local, and organic ingredients. As for cultural showcase aspect, Malaysia is renowned for its multicultural culinary heritage, influenced by Malay, Chinese, Indian, Thai, and Indonesian cuisines. Gastronomic tourism allows visitors to experience this rich blend of flavours and cooking traditions firsthand. Cuisine serves as a potent vehicle for the interchange of cultures. Travelers can improve cross-cultural understanding by learning about Malaysia's history, customs, and cultural practices through culinary tourism. The pursuit of one-of-a-kind and spectacular dining experience is known as "culinary tourism". It is vital to create and provide not only a range of foods but also intriguing and unique cuisines, in order to achieve maximum satisfaction among tourists. Consequently, customer loyalty will increase and the quality of the country's tourism services will improve. Culinary tourism is an essential element in the tourism business, but many researchers have yet to conduct an in-depth study in this field (Balderas- Cejudo et al., 2019). This is due to the fact that the topic of gastronomy is still rather peculiar to researchers who are not from the hospitality and tourism industries.

This study aimed to strengthen insight as well as entrepreneurs' inventiveness in presenting and promoting Malaysian foodstuff, especially in Penang, to tourists. In order to preserve and promote local cuisines via local food products and traditional cooking methods, gastronomic tourism supports local farmers, fishermen, and artisans, thus, helping to preserve traditional practices and sustain local industries. Gastronomic tourism is crucial for Malaysia as it intertwines economic benefits with cultural preservation and regional development. Malaysia not only attracts global tourists but also fosters a deeper appreciation for its rich cultural heritage and local traditions by showcasing its diverse culinary offerings.

Service Quality

Service quality is one of the factors that influences tourists' satisfaction when they visit Penang's food and beverage industry. According to Kinasih and Usman (2021), service quality is defined as satisfying tourist expectations on a constant basis. Service quality can be determined by comparing user expectations to service performance (Angmalisang., 2021). The best service to tourists may be constantly accomplished by upgrading services and paying special attention to high service standards, whether they are internal or external (Cetin., 2020). Every tourist who visits an area expects the best service possible from all aspects (Lahay et al., 2021). In the context of Penang, a renowned food destination in Malaysia, the impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction in the food and beverage industry, particularly post Covid-19 pandemic, is multifaceted. Tourists have become more concerned about cleanliness and safety in the post-pandemic era.

A high standard of hygiene and visible health protocols, namely regular sanitation and wearing of masks by staff, are crucial for ensuring customer trust and satisfaction. Service quality hinges on well-trained staff who can deliver excellent customer service. Friendly, knowledgeable, and attentive service enhances the dining experience and can significantly impact tourist satisfaction. Consistency in food quality and service standards is crucial, as tourists expect the same high level of service they have heard about or experienced previously, while inconsistencies can lead to dissatisfaction and negative reviews. In the post Covid-19 pandemic era, service quality remains a critical factor that influences tourist satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage industry. Hence, by prioritizing health and safety, maintaining high standards of service, ensuring consistency, as well as offering unique and value-for-money experiences, food and beverage establishments can effectively meet the expectations of modern tourists. Addressing these aspects not only enhances immediate customer satisfaction but also fosters long-term loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Travel Destination

Travel destinations significantly influence tourist satisfaction in relation to the food and beverage industry, especially in a culturally rich and renowned place like Penang (Malaysia). The image of Georgetown, Penang, depicts a tourist's fears and expectations regarding the conceptualization, appeal, feelings, and overall perspective of a certain tourist spot (Tuerlan et al., 2021). According to Mohamad et al (2019), a destination's image has a comparable impact on word-of-mouth among visiting tourists through the growth of destination satisfaction as perceived by service quality and perceived value (Chen et al., 2020). This demonstrates a pattern of tourists' review intentions being influenced (Chen et al., 2020).

Qualities of a destination are an important instrument for achieving tourist satisfaction and the intent to return (Ratnasari et al., 2020).

A destination's strong image gives a leg up on competitors. Greater destination attributes result in greater satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. Climate, historic scenery, scenic beauty, beaches, cultural events, rest and relaxation, prestige, adventure, social interaction, benefits, interests, and accessibility are some of the marketable image attributes that affect tourist destinations (Lu et al., 2020). In respect to culinary reputation, Penang is well-known for its vibrant food scene and diverse culinary heritage. The destination's reputation for excellent food can heighten expectations. Tourists are drawn to Penang specifically for its renowned street food, local delicacies, and unique culinary experiences, which can positively or negatively impact their satisfaction based on whether these expectations are met. Apart from reputation, accessibility and convenience are also factors that affect tourist satisfaction. Ease of access to food and beverage establishments plays a crucial role in tourists' satisfaction. Convenient transportation options, including public transit, ride-sharing services, and well-maintained roads, can affect tourists' ability to visit various dining spots without a hassle. Restaurants and cafes located in easily accessible areas, such as near popular tourist spots or accommodations, are more likely to attract tourists. Proximity to other attractions can enhance convenience and overall satisfaction.

Memorable Experience

Research on memorable experiences in tourism highlights their crucial role in shaping overall satisfaction and loyalty. Food plays a central role in creating memorable travel experiences. Sampling local dishes and participating in food-related activities can enhance a tourist's overall enjoyment and satisfaction levels. Penang is celebrated for its unique and diverse food offerings. Providing authentic local culinary experiences, along with engaging explanations of the food's cultural significance, can enhance tourist satisfaction. Experiencing the local cuisine is regarded as a delightful vacation activity that elicits a variety of emotions such as satisfaction, sensory stimulation, and fulfilment (Sthapit et al., 2020).

Once tourists explore a local cuisine, they are introduced to the local culture, and emotional bonds could form as a result (Seyfi et al., 2019). When individuals have the option to enjoy the local cuisine, which is likely to differ from their usual diet, they frequently expect it to have a pleasurable emotional experience (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Tourists are increasingly drawn to unique and novel food experiences that they cannot find elsewhere. In Penang, this includes signature dishes, exclusive dining settings, and innovative culinary presentations. The study found that memorable dining experiences are significantly influenced by the uniqueness of the food offerings and the overall dining environment. A memorable journey is enhanced by the positive feelings emerging from a just concluded vacation (Sthapit et al., 2020). Negative emotions are associated with a sense of dissatisfaction or disappointment, and tourists may associate a negative experience with either the tourist spot or the level of service offered (Sthapit et al., 2020). Distasteful food may be much more remembered than good tasting food for health reasons, and emotion is a key indicator that manages a traveller's experience (Batat et al., 2019).

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be described as a pleasurable sensation arising from a tourist's assessment of an item's performance against a few purchase norms (Hanafiah et al., 2019). Tourists who were satisfied with previous visits to a destination may want a similar but different experience with different goals (Roslan, 2021). Since the word-of-mouth method of communication is the most reliable and frequently sought type of information for people interested in travelling, it is comparatively more important for the destination (Pai et al., 2020). Tourist satisfaction is important for promoting a destination because it influences destination choices, administrative operations, and specific industries, such as the food and beverage industry (Zhang et al., 2019). Once performance exceeds expectations in the user activity context, the result is pleasure attained by the tourist, or otherwise known as satisfaction. When expectations exceed performance, the effect is a disappointment. Therefore, evaluating a tourist's happiness in places such as Penang may assist the destination's management in analysing and updating tourist interaction as well as producing fantastic destination promotions.

Research Framework

This study's conceptual framework for "Factors That Affect Tourist Satisfaction in Penang's Food and Beverage Industry in the Post Covid-19 Pandemic Era" is illustrated in Figure 1.

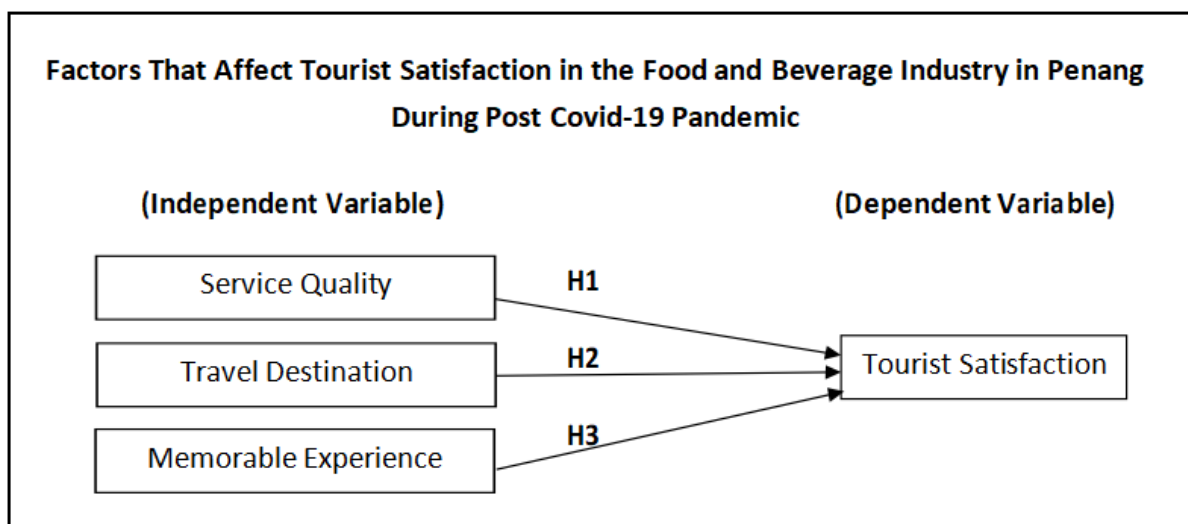


Figure 1: Research Framework

Source: Adapted from Süer (2021), Deng and Tang, (2020), Sthapit et al., (2020), and Pai et al.,(2020)

Three hypotheses were created based on the theoretical framework:

H1: There is a positive relationship between service quality and tourists' satisfaction.

H2: There is a positive relationship between travel destination and tourists' satisfaction.

H3: There is a positive relationship between memorable experiences and tourist satisfaction

Methodology

Participants and procedure

This quantitative study aimed to examine tourists' satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage industry in the post Covid-19 pandemic era. Questionnaires were distributed to 384 respondents in Malaysia. Data collection was carried out from 15th June 2022 to 30th June 2022 and respondents were required to answer all questions in the survey using a Google

form uploaded in social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The study's respondents were tourists from various states in Malaysia who were selected using the non-probability sampling method, whereby some people in the population have an equal chance of being selected (McCombes, 2021). Any person approached by the study was included as a sample in a facility sample (McCombes, 2021). Since the respondents comprised tourists from various states in Malaysia, calculating the minimum sample size required for the survey was relatively easy. This was because the real population size of tourists living in different states in Malaysia appears to be uncertain and erroneous in most cases. In other words, the study's population may be categorized as unknown.

Questionnaire development and instrumentation

Questions for each section were developed based on the research objective and the dimensions of the study framework. There were six main sections in the questionnaire related to the research questions and objectives. The questionnaire involved multiple-choice questions with a 5-point Likert scale. Sources for all of the instruments are presented in the table by section.

Table 3.1
Survey Instrument for the Research Variable

Section	Measures	Sources	Measurement Scale	No. of Item
A	Demographic	Researcher	Nominal and ordinal scale	4
B	Introduction of Gastronomic Tourism			5
B1	Service Quality	Suer (2021)	Interval Scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)	5
B2	Travel Destination	(Deng and Tan, 2022)	Interval Scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)	5
B3	Memorable Experience	(Sthapit et al., 2020)	Interval Scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)	5
C	Tourist Satisfaction	(Pai et al.,2020)	Interval Scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)	5

Data Analysis

The SPSS v20 software was used to generate the data obtained from the questionnaires. This study used the descriptive statistical analysis for respondents' demographic profile and reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha). Data were then analysed statistically using the Pearson correlation to test the hypotheses.

Findings*Descriptive Analysis*

Descriptive variable analysis of respondents in this study who made a gastronomic trip to Penang during the post Covid-19 pandemic era

Table 4.1
Demographic profile of respondents

Variables		Frequency
Percent		
Gender		
Male	152	28.2
Female	331	43.6
Age		
18	19	3.6
19	10	1.9
20	12	2.2
21	15	2.8
22	37	6.9
23	123	23.0
24	32	6.0
25	28	5.2
26	13	2.4
27	9	1.7
28	2	0.4
29	4	0.7
30	11	2.1
31	4	0.7
32	6	1.1
33	2	0.4
34	12	2.2
35	2	0.4
36	7	1.3
40	10	1.9
41	2	0.4
42	2	0.4
43	5	0.9
45	2	0.4
46	3	0.6
47	5	0.9
50	4	0.7
60	3	0.6
State		
Kedah	164	30.7
Kelantan	66	12.3
Penang	60	11.2
Perak	43	8.0
Johor	5	0.9

Perlis	17	3.2
Pahang	12	2.2
Sarawak	4	0.7
Selangor	13	2.4
Race		
Malay	364	68.0
Chinese	8	1.5
Indian	0	0
Others	12	2.2
Monthly Income		
Below RM2,000	324	60.6
RM2,500-RM3,500	60	11.2
RM4,000-RM5,000	0	0
RM5,000 and above	0	0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gastronomic tourists) from various states in Malaysia. Majority of the respondents were females (233 respondents or 28.2%), and the rest were males (151 respondents or 28.2%). Respondents were from Kedah (164 respondents or 30.7%) , Kelantan (66 respondents or 12.3%) , Penang (60 respondents or 11.2%) , Perak (43 respondents or 8.0%) , Johor (5 respondents or 0.9%) , Perlis (17 respondents 3.2%), Pahang (12 respondents or 2.2%), Sarawak (4 respondents or 0.7%), and lastly, Selangor (13 respondents or 2.4%). In terms of race, the majority of respondents were Malay (364 respondents or 68.0%), with the rest being Chinese (8 respondents or 1.5%) , and other races (12 respondents or 2.2%), while there were no Indian respondents (0%). As for monthly income, 324 respondents (60.6%) earned RM2000 or less, and 60 respondents (11.2%) earned between RM2,500 to RM3,500.

Descriptive Statistics of the Measurement Scale

Table 4.2: Overall Mean Score for Service Quality, Travel Destination, Memorable Experience, Tourists' Satisfaction

	N	Minimum	Maximum	4 th Column	SD
Service Quality	384	1	5	4.15	0.521
Travel Destination	384	1	5	4.17	0.508
Memorable Experience	384	1	5	4.15	0.489
Tourist Satisfaction	383	1	5	4.39	0.550

Note: The items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Table 2 shows the overall mean score for service quality, travel destination, memorable experience, and tourists' satisfaction. These mean scores indicate the respondent's level of agreement for each measurement item.

Reliability Analysis

Table 4.3

Reliability Analysis

Questionnaire	Reliability Results	No. of item
Section C: Service Quality (IV)	0.904	5
Section D: Travel Destination (IV)	0.905	5
Section E: Memorable Experience (IV)	0.921	5
Section F: Tourist Satisfaction (DV)	0.941	5
Total items		20

Note: No. of respondents = 384

Table 4.3 above shows that the Cronbach alpha (reliability) value for quality service, which is the primary variable in this study, is 0.904, while the value for travel destination is 0.905. Memorable experience had the third highest value at 0.921, followed by tourist satisfaction with 0.941.

Hypothesis Testing*Correlation Coefficient Test*

Table 4.4

Correlations (Service Quality, Travel Destination, Memorable Experience) with Tourist Satisfaction

Variables	Correlation, r	Sig (2-tailed)
Service Quality	0.695	0.000
Travel Destination	0.737	0.000
Memorable Experience	0.688	0.000

*Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

***.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Service Quality

According to Table 4.4, the Pearson correlation results indicate the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction related to gastronomic tourism in Penang during the post Covid-19 pandemic era. The Pearson's correlation coefficient for service quality is $r = 0.695$, $N=384$; however, the relationship is significant ($p = 0.000$). An r value of 0.695 indicates a strong positive linear relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction. This means that as the perceived service quality increases, the level of tourist satisfaction tends to increase as well. Improvements in service quality are expected to lead to higher tourist satisfaction. Hence, if service quality is a key driver of tourist satisfaction, investing in better service practices, training, and customer service can lead to improved satisfaction levels. This finding can prove valuable for businesses and destinations aiming to enhance their service offerings to boost customer satisfaction. Hence, there is a strong positive linear relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in gastronomic tourism pertaining to Penang's

food and beverage industry during the post Covid-19 pandemic era. Therefore, these data are highly correlated.

Travel Destination

According to Table 4.4, a Pearson Correlation coefficient of 0.737 indicates a strong positive relationship between the travel destination and tourist satisfaction in the context of gastronomic tourism in Penang's food and beverage industry during the post-Covid-19 pandemic era. Pearson's correlation coefficient for travel destination is $r = 0.737$, $N=384$, which suggests that with an increase in the appeal or quality of the travel destination, tourist satisfaction tends to increase as well. The value of 0.737 is relatively high, indicating that the relationship between travel destination attributes and tourist satisfaction is strong, has a significant association, and the data is highly correlated. In practical terms, this strong positive correlation implies that improving factors related to the travel destination, such as local food offerings, dining experiences, reputation, accessibility, convenient transportation and overall ambiance, could lead to higher levels of tourist satisfaction. As for Penang's food and beverage industry, this insight can help tailor marketing strategies, improve service quality, and enhance the overall tourist experience in a way that aligns with what travellers value most in a gastronomic context.

Memorable Experience

According to Table 4.4, the Pearson correlation results give an indication of the relationship between memorable experience and tourist satisfaction pertaining to gastronomic tourism in Penang's food and beverage industry in the post Covid-19 pandemic era. The Pearson's Correlation coefficient for memorable experience is $r = 0.688$, $N=384$; however, the relationship is significant ($p = 0.000$). A correlation of 0.688 signifies that as the level of memorable experiences increase, tourist satisfaction also tends to increase. In other words, when tourists have more memorable or exceptional experiences, their overall satisfaction with the gastronomic tourism offerings is likely to be higher. A coefficient of 0.688 is robust, which indicates a significant association between the two variables. While it's not a perfect correlation, it still suggests a strong link, which means that memorable experiences have a considerable impact on tourists' satisfaction. In practical terms, this suggests that focusing on creating unique, engaging, and memorable experiences for tourists can significantly enhance their satisfaction. As for the food and beverage industry in Penang, this might involve offering distinctive culinary experiences, exceptional service, or unique dining environments and leave a lasting impression on tourists.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the most important factors that affect tourist satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage industry during the post Covid-19 pandemic era. Findings confirm that there is a positive relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction (H1). It is important to improve the existing service quality so that tourists are comfortable making a gastronomic excursion to a particular place. The authenticity of local foods should also be preserved, and the quality of the authenticity should be improved so that tourists' satisfaction can be achieved.

A destination's quality is a significant tool used for increasing tourists' satisfaction and the willingness to revisit a particular destination. The surrounding atmosphere is also crucial

because it attempts to inspire tourists and urge them to purchase food and beverage products or services. Safety and security have been established as the main factors influencing the selection of tourist destinations because a safe destination can guarantee tourists' safety, while providing a sense of tranquillity and comfort to them.

This study shows that memorable experiences contribute to the factors influencing the food and beverage industry in Penang during the post COVID-19 pandemic era. Tourists' satisfaction in visiting Malaysia, particularly Penang, can be measured through the unique experience they attain. Results of this study support all the research objectives and the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Malaysian tourism has been impacted in various ways by the Covid-19 pandemic. First was the newly created personal hygiene rules, which had made personal hygiene the most crucial factor post Covid-19 in order to curtail the spread of the virus. Personal hygiene requirements and SOP were introduced on the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and they are still in use somewhat to safeguard the safety and hygiene of the general population as well as tourists. Second, due to the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, many tourist destinations had closed and travel restrictions were enforced to contain the virus and slow its spread. This meant that these tourists were no longer allowed to enter the country or cross state borders at tourist destinations that depended on tourism. Hence, the ensuing economic recession had affected tourists' destinations. The impact of Covid-19 also had significant economic repercussions on innumerable tourist destinations, which were exacerbated by limitations and lock-outs that made it difficult for tourists to visit places like restaurants or bars. This led to the loss of uncountable jobs and the decline of tourist destinations. Consequently, based on the impact that stated earlier, it is apparent that tourist satisfaction is influenced by service quality, travel destination, and memorable experiences. Tourists will in future be more cautious when planning a gourmet excursion to a certain location.

Conclusion

In the post Covid-19 pandemic era, factors such as service quality, travel destination's appeal, and the ability to create memorable experiences are key drivers of tourist satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage. Businesses can enhance their attractiveness, meet evolving tourist expectations, and contribute to the recovery and growth of gastronomic tourism in the region by addressing these factors effectively. Implementing robust service standards, emphasizing Penang's unique culinary and cultural offerings, as well as focusing on delivering exceptional and memorable experiences will be crucial in ensuring high levels of tourist satisfaction and fostering a positive reputation in the competitive tourism market.

In the wake of Covid-19, heightened expectations around health and safety issues had intensified the importance of service quality. Tourists began to expect rigorous hygiene practices, clear communication about safety protocols, and a seamless service experience. Service quality, which comprises the responsiveness, professionalism, and friendliness of staff, as well as the efficiency of service delivery, is a pivotal factor in determining overall tourist satisfaction.

Tourists' satisfaction is greatly influenced by the travel destination's attractiveness, particularly its cultural and visual features. As for gastronomic tourism, this not only refers to

the food quality but also the ambiance and cultural significance of the dining experience. Tourists are increasingly looking for destinations that offer unique and enriching experiences while ensuring safety. Penang's reputation as a culinary hotspot can be leveraged to attract tourists seeking authentic local food experiences.

Creating memorable experiences is essential for achieving high-level tourist satisfaction. This includes unique culinary offerings, engaging dining environments, and exceptional customer interactions. In a period where travel experiences are more precious and often limited, making a lasting impression becomes even more critical. Tourists value unique and impressive personalized experiences that provide a sense of connection and authenticity.

Next, this study only made generalizations about factors that influence tourists' satisfaction with the range of respondents included in the survey. However, it did not focus on certain divisions regarding factors that influence tourists' satisfaction in Penang's food and beverage industry during the post Covid-19 pandemic era.

Suggestions for future research should include other variables related to tourist satisfaction. For example, if tourists are satisfied with the quality provided, they will have some intention to revisit the eatery in Penang for another nostalgic experience. The theoretical model of the current study can be extended by adding other variables, such as behavioural intention as a mediator between service quality, travel destination, memorable experience and tourist satisfaction. Other suggested recommendations for future studies can focus on how digital platforms, such as social media and online review sites, impact tourist expectations and satisfaction. This could be performed by analysing online reviews, social media sentiments, and digital marketing's effectiveness in shaping perceptions about Penang's food and beverage offerings. Therefore, by addressing these areas, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction in gastronomic tourism and help industry stakeholders enhance their offerings and effectively plan their strategies.

Acknowledgment

This study would not have led to fruition without the support of faculty member from the Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Culinary Art Department, whose invaluable knowledge and competence assisted me in dealing with the successful publication of my article titled "*Factors that Affect Tourist Satisfaction in Penang's Food and Beverage Industry During the Post Covid-19 Pandemic*".

I sincerely appreciate all the guidance, mentoring and resources offered by the renowned university's academic members and researchers. Results of this study have been significantly shaped by their commitment towards academic excellence and the creation of a supportive research environment.

In addition, I would like to thank the editorial team and reviewers for their constructive feedback, valuable suggestions, insightful comments, careful editing, and timely handling of the manuscript. I sincerely appreciate all your valuable comments and suggestions, which helped this study to improve the quality of the manuscript.

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