



Food Tourism and Visitor Satisfaction on Food Perception in the World Heritage Town, Luang Prabang Province
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Abstract

Culinary heritage is a central element of tourism experiences, particularly in destinations where food traditions shape cultural identity. This study explores how domestic tourists perceive local cuisine in Luang Prabang, Laos, and how these perceptions influence satisfaction. Using survey data and statistical modeling, the research examines demographic influences, information sources, dining behaviors, and spending patterns. Findings reveal that satisfaction is strongly linked to ease of eating food, table arrangement, and authenticity—that significantly influence tourist satisfaction with Luang Prabang cuisine. The study recommends enhancing experiential aspects of food service through improved ease of eating food, table arrangement, and authenticity.

Keywords: gastronomy, food tourism, satisfaction, perception, Food

1. Introduction

Culinary encompasses more than the act of cooking and eating; it represents the cultural, social, and historical connections embedded in cuisine. Scholars increasingly define gastronomy as the study of how food preparation, consumption, and representation intersect with art, science, and identity (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2017). In recent years, many countries have embraced food tourism as a strategic tool to attract visitors, recognizing cuisine as both a cultural expression and an economic driver (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Everett & Slocum, 2013).

Food tourism provides travelers with immersive cultural experiences while generating income for local communities. In Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site, gastronomy has become a vital component of tourism development. The Lao Tourism Department (2022) estimates that culinary tourism could create more than 70,000 jobs, supported by modern media and online platforms that promote authentic food experiences. Globally, the food industry increasingly shapes tourism growth, offering narratives of authenticity that appeal to visitors' emotions and perceptions (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Richards, 2015; Okumus, 2021).

Luang Prabang has experienced significant growth in visitor numbers, welcoming over 3.5 million tourists in the past five years (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2025). However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted this progress, reducing arrivals by more than 70% and causing widespread financial hardship (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2020). Recovery strategies such as the Lao Safe program and the Lao-China railway have since revitalized tourism, with "Green Travel Zones" enabling controlled reopening (Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and

Tourism, 2021; UNWTO, 2022; Xinhua News Agency, 2022).

As food trends evolve, restaurants and hotels in Luang Prabang have adapted menus to balance local authenticity with international appeal. This study aims to analyze how perceptions of local cuisine influence tourist satisfaction. Besides that, the culinary trends in Luang Prabang, especially for the hotels and restaurants, have adapted to serve the food on the lists of local and international menus. The entrepreneurs adapted their ways of representing the local food authentically. This change was initiated by changing the tourism recovery plan; the mode of traveling the tourist's market destination focused more on local and Thai tourists. However, after the Covid-19 recovery, more studies about culinary under Lao-safe travel and their satisfaction during the visit to The World Heritage in Luang Prabang. Also, improve the local menu, which meets and matches the group of tourists in the recent tourism trend. The objectives of this study focus on the relationship between the tourist perception towards satisfaction after eating Lao food in Luang Prabang.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Population and Sample Group

Fieldwork was conducted at popular tourist sites that offered representative local cuisine. After sampling food, participants were invited to complete a structured questionnaire. When the exact number of visitors was unknown, Cochran's formula was applied to determine sample size at a 95% confidence level, yielding a target 404 valid responses were collected through both online and paper surveys.

2.2 Research Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: (1) demographic information, (2) perceptions of local food,

(3) dining behavior, and (4) satisfaction with local cuisine, including suggestions for improvement. Items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), supplemented by multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

2.3 Data Collection

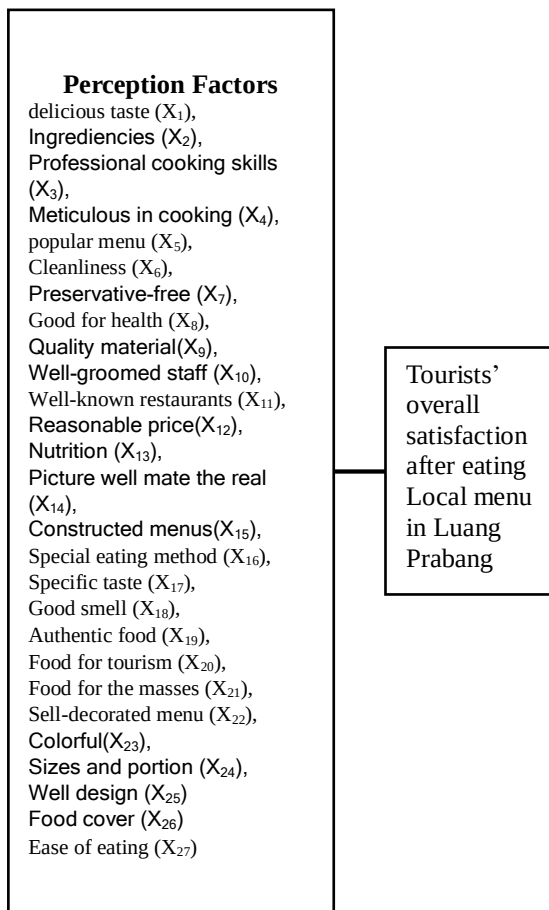
Surveys were distributed across Luang Prabang to domestic tourists from 16 provinces. Both online and offline methods were employed to ensure broad participation

2.4 Research Design

A survey research design was adopted to capture perceptions and behaviors systematically. This approach allowed for the identification of trends and relationships between food perceptions and satisfaction.

2.5 Research Hypothesis

The study tested 27 hypotheses, examining whether factors positively influenced overall satisfaction.



2.6 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic profiles and perceptions. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS software to test the relationship between predictor variables and tourist satisfaction, with mean scores and standard deviations reported.

3. Results

Respondent Profile

Most of the questionnaire respondents are from Vientiane Capital cover 47.3%, their gender was female cover 57.7%, their age group were between 20–30 years cover 45.5%, holding a bachelor's degree cover 71.3%, their marital status single cover 63.4%, and earning between 1,000,000–3,000,000 Lao kip cover 47.3%.

Eating Behavior of Luang Prabang Food

Most respondents have eaten Luang Prabang food more than once 83.7%. They learned about Luang Prabang food mainly from friends cover 30.1%. Common dining places include food course in night market roadside stalls cover 23.6%. The decision to eat Luang Prabang food was made independently cover 83.7%. their average length of stay were in 3 days cover 35.1%, their purpose of visit was relaxation cover 64.1%, their food expenditure between 500,000–1,000,000 kip cover 33.2%, their typical menu items consumed composed of river weed cover 75.5%, chili paste cover 70.5%, papaya salad cover 65.8%, stew cover 63.5%, noodle soup cover 29.8%, roasted rice cover 36.5%, Luang Prabang sausage cover 42.3%, rice noodle soup cover 41.5%, grilled meat cover 36%, pho cover 29.8% and fish salad 65.8%.

Perceptions of Luang Prabang Food

Overall perception is rated high $\bar{X} = 3.36$ S.D = 0.79, covering 13 aspects: delicious (X_1) $\bar{X} = 3.69$ S.D = 1.05, menu popular (X_5) $\bar{X} = 3.70$ S.D = 1.06, cleanness (X_6) $\bar{X} = 3.47$ S.D = 1.06, good for health (X_8) $\bar{X} = 3.54$ S.D = 1.08, The restaurant well known (X_{11}) $\bar{X} = 3.42$ S.D = 1.10, special eating method (X_{16}) $\bar{X} = 3.46$ S.D = 1.11, specific taste (X_{17}) $\bar{X} = 3.56$ S.D = 1.04, good smell (X_{18}) $\bar{X} = 3.48$ S.D = 1.04, authentic food (X_{19}) $\bar{X} = 3.71$ S.D = 1.08, food for tourism (X_{20}) $\bar{X} = 3.61$ S.D = 1.05, food for the masses (X_{21}) $\bar{X} = 3.59$ S.D = 1.00, well decorate (X_{22}) $\bar{X} = 3.50$ S.D = 0.99 ease to eat food (X_{27}) $\bar{X} = 3.49$ S.D = 0.98

Overall perception is rated moderate composed of 14 aspects: Ingredients (X_2) $\bar{X} = 3.06$ S.D = 1.14, Professional cooking skills (X_3) $\bar{X} = 2.85$ S.D = 1.19, Meticulous in cooking (X_4) $\bar{X} = 3.03$ S.D = 0.1.17, Preservative-free (X_7) $\bar{X} = 2.91$ S.D = 1.09, Quality material (X_9) $\bar{X} = 3.30$ S.D = 1.09, Well-groomed staff (X_{10}) $\bar{X} = 3.38$ S.D = 1.06, Reasonable price (X_{12}) $\bar{X} = 3.14$ S.D = 1.09, Nutrition (X_{13}) $\bar{X} = 3.28$ S.D = 1.02, picture well mate the real (X_{14}) $\bar{X} = 3.23$ S.D = 0.93, Constructed menus (X_{15}) $\bar{X} = 3.26$ S.D = 1.02, colorful (X_{23}) $\bar{X} = 3.40$ S.D = 1.03, sizes and portion (X_{24}) $\bar{X} = 3.24$ S.D = 0.98, well design (X_{25}) $\bar{X} = 3.22$ S.D = 1.02 and food cover (X_{26}) $\bar{X} = 3.33$ S.D = 1.02.

Tourist satisfaction after consuming Luang Prabang food

Overall satisfaction is also rated high $\bar{X} = 3.69$ S.D = 0.65, consisting of 9 aspects: local distinctiveness $\bar{X} = 3.96$ S.D = 0.83, culinary standards $\bar{X} = 3.78$ S.D = 0.78,

restaurant surroundings $\bar{X} = 3.89$ S.D = 0.86, food of nutritional worth $\bar{X} = 3.55$ S.D = 0.83, food representation $\bar{X} = 3.73$ S.D = 0.82, creative gastronomy $\bar{X} = 3.62$ S.D = 0.84, food categorization $\bar{X} = 3.50$ S.D = 0.84, decorative cuisine $\bar{X} = 3.64$ S.D = 0.81 and table display $\bar{X} = 3.52$ S.D = 0.84.

Regression Analysis Results

Statistical regression analysis shows that the perception factors of Luang Prabang food tourism have a strong linear relationship with tourist satisfaction after consuming Luang Prabang food, explaining up to 62.50% of satisfaction. Key influential factors include: ease of eating food (X_{27}) $\beta_{27}=0.213$, table arrangement (X_{25}) $\beta_{25}=0.165$ and authentic food (X_{19}) $\beta_{19}=0.097$. These factors significantly contribute to the satisfaction of tourists after experiencing Luang Prabang cuisine.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research by Quintal et al. (2010), Sounthaly (2019) and Xiufang (2022), which demonstrated that knowledge significantly influences travel intention. However, knowledge alone does not immediately alter attitudes or directly shape behavioral intentions. Vilayphone et al. (2019) identified economic factors, taste of food, culture, health, and emotion as key influences on tourist satisfaction. Their study revealed that satisfaction after consuming Lao food was rated at a “high” level, with respondents indicating they would recommend it to others. Wang and Cheng (2018) further emphasized that for behavioral change to occur of individuals must possess knowledge, believe in the behavior and hold favorable attitudes toward it. Behavioral analysis revealed that males participated in eating outside the home, with decision-making often accompanied by friends. These findings align with Nattapong Kuma (2006), who studied tourist behavior in Pai District, Mae Hong Son Province. His research showed that most tourists traveled for rest and relaxation, often for the first time and with friends. Thai tourists primarily used personal cars, while foreign tourists relied on public buses. Thai tourists typically stayed for 2–3 days, whereas foreign tourists averaged more than 7 days. The young generation are the key drivers included: 1) Desire to visit famous places; 2) Trends in local food tourism; and 3) Perceptions that daily food is expensive compared to its quality, as shown in Studies of Generation Y tourists (Puri Chunkajorn & Chawalee Na Thalang, 2021; Phitsamai, 2018). Unexpected results emerged based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Although tourists prepared their travel plans, perceptions of food tourism were only at a moderate level. Single tourists accessed different sources of information compared to married tourists, often relying on internet reviews, prior food experiences, and recommendations from travel companions. Domestic tourists showed minimal reliance

on travel agencies, and short promotional videos about food tourism were rarely encountered. Foreign tourists did not express strong interest in consuming local food, and fan-based marketing promotions were absent.

These results are consistent with broader literature on food tourism, which emphasizes convenience, spatial design, and cultural authenticity as central determinants of culinary experiences. The regression analysis revealed that ease of eating food is a strong predictor of satisfaction. This aligns with prior research indicating that accessibility and convenience reduce barriers to participation in gastronomic tourism (Jimenez-Arpiza et al., 2026). The role of table arrangement further underscores the importance of physical and social environments in shaping dining experiences. Studies in hospitality design suggest that spatial layouts and table settings influence both comfort and social interaction, which in turn affect satisfaction (HoReCa.Furniture, 2026; Parker, 2026), also, food authenticity emerged as one of the most influential factors, consistent with global findings that authenticity is a cornerstone of food tourism satisfaction (Eck, Zielinski, & Ahn, 2026; Espiritu, 2026). Taken together, these three factors explain a substantial proportion of tourist satisfaction (62.5%), demonstrating that Luang Prabang’s food tourism success depends on balancing practical accessibility, thoughtful spatial design, and cultural authenticity. The consistency of these findings with international literature strengthens their validity and underscores the importance of integrating both functional and cultural dimensions in culinary tourism strategies.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Luang Prabang food tourism is characterized by young, educated female visitors from Vientiane Capital, whose consumption patterns reflect both repeat engagement and independent decision-making across diverse dining contexts. Respondents reported consistently high perceptions of Luang Prabang cuisine, particularly in relation to taste, authenticity, cleanliness, and ease of eating, which translated into equally high levels of satisfaction encompassing cultural distinctiveness, culinary standards, and creative gastronomy. Regression analysis confirmed a strong linear relationship between perception and satisfaction, with authenticity, table arrangement, and ease of eating emerging as significant predictors, collectively explaining 62.50% of tourist satisfaction. These findings underscore the pivotal role of Luang Prabang cuisine as both a cultural asset and a driver of tourism satisfaction, highlighting the importance of sustaining authenticity, enhancing presentation, and ensuring accessibility to strengthen its contribution to sustainable cultural tourism development.

6. Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial organization regarding the materials discussed in the manuscript.

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