

Local Food Cultures Leading to Gastronomy Tourism in Udon Thani Province

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Abstract

This article is about gastronomy tourism in Udon Thani Province aimed 1) to present the concept of gastronomy in Thailand and Udon Thani Province, and 2) to propose guidelines to promote gastronomy tourism in Udon Thani Province. It was found that the local food identity of Udon Thani Province which local food is a part of the soft power in promoting tourism to the government. When traveling, tourists have to try the local food at the destination. Udon Thani Province is famous for its religious belief tourism (Mutelu) which travels to worship sacred things in the province. Gastronomy tourism is an alternative tourism in Udon Thani Province besides spiritual belief. It is considered a tourist attraction with many ethnicities. Local food originates from different ethnic groups and is mixed and prepared as local food in Udon Thani. There are many types of tastes in Udon Thani people's food, factors affecting food tourism in Udon Thani Province include the location of local restaurants, food quality, personal factors, factors in packaging and food containers, factors in tourist services, and also awareness, preservation, responsibility for the environment society, culture and tourism experience as well. The guidelines for promoting food tourism in Udon Thani Province consist of 4 aspects: local food identity, activities, and social media and network partners This will serve as a guideline for relevant agencies to promote gastronomy tourism marketing in Udon Thani Province. To stimulate the gastronomy tourism economy align with other forms of tourism to be effective.

Keywords: Gastronomy Tourism, Local food, Udon Thani Province

1. Introduction

Thailand is considered one of the world's most important food destinations, whether it is local street food or even a variety of restaurants to choose from. Gastronomy tourism in Thailand is the same. It is a destination that attracts tourists from all over the world to taste delicious food in popular tourist spots. It also creates a food cycle that can create jobs and generate sustainable income for local people (Benjamaphorn, 2018). Moreover, food is considered one of the four essential factors for humans and also represents the culture, civilization, and long history of each locality (Thipwadee&Aphithai, 2022). In street vendors, there are many stories about food freedom, biodiversity, energy use, and others that are involved. Therefore, food is an important and sustainable part that is involved and connected to the way of life of people in the community. The benefits of food tourism are not only attracting tourists to Thailand or Udon Thani Province but also creating jobs and income. And the good life for the local people (Atanat et al., 2020). In addition, food can also allow tourists

to learn about new experiences through experiencing the lifestyle and culture of the people in the community. Food is the main factor in creating experiences through various forms of tourism activities, such as tasting food, learning, selecting ingredients, and trying to cook by yourself. In addition, visiting places that are sources of raw materials for cooking is a very impressive experience for tourists (Manager Online, 2017). It can be said that food is a main component of tourism activities by presenting the identity of the area, lifestyle, and culture of the locality, as well as creating new experiences for tourists. It is also a tool for developing tourist attractions (Herrera, Herranz, and Ailla, 2012; Phatthaphon, 2015). In addition, it can be seen that food tourism is becoming one of the important trends in the tourism industry both globally, in Thailand, and locally because of the diversity of cultures, traditions, civilizations, and local foods, Udon Thani Province is another province with high potential to develop food tourism in Thailand. Udon Thani Province is considered an economic city of the upper northeastern region. It is a province with a MICE industry with its geographical advantage of being located only 50 kilometers from the Mekong River, which can connect to the capital city of Vientiane, Lao PDR, which is a rich source of natural resources for various ethnicities, easy transportation, and modern infrastructure, it has fresh and unique ingredients. It has a rich and diverse source of food ingredients, along with a food culture that combines Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese, which are large communities. There are great and diverse food festivals from every corner of the country to organize food festivals throughout the year. Therefore, the food of Udon Thani Province has a variety of flavors and unique characteristics that are different from other regions of the country. It can attract a large number of both Thai and foreign tourists to visit.

1.2 Objective

- 1) To present the concept of food tourism in Udon Thani Province
- 2) To propose guidelines for promoting food tourism in Udon Thani Province

The importance of food tourism in Thailand

The heart of food tourism is based on four main pillars that make the components of food tourism complete: Farming Systems, Food Story, Creative Industries, and Sustainable Tourism, which help drive local development based on the conservation and promotion of local food stories (Prachachart Business Online, 2019). Food tourism is a new tourism trend that has emerged in the past few years. In addition, new-age tourists are interested in traveling to new places that no one has been to (Off the Beaten Path) and are seeking out local food with novelty and different flavors. They also enjoy consuming stories (Stories) of the origins of local food, including directly supporting community products (Salika Online, 2023).

Food Tourism Situation

The survey project aims to analyze the behavior of international tourists in the first half of the year, between January and June 2023, it shows that the main factors that tourists choose to travel to Thailand are

1. The meaning of the tourist attraction 54.98%
2. Food and beverage 50.61%
3. The friendliness of the local people 37.45%

In addition, the most popular activity is choosing to eat and taste Thai food is up to 91.81% (Marketing Research Center, Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2024). It can be seen that food and beverages are the most important reasons that tourists visit Thailand and choose to eat various types of food.

As shown in Figure 1

การรับประทานอาหาร	
	Street Food 77.03%
	Local Cuisine Tour/Local Table/ Local Restaurant 45.72%
	Fine Dining – Thai Cuisine 38.11%
	Cafe hopping 30.22%
	Fine Dining – International Cuisine 13.12%

Figure 1: Food tourism behavior in Thailand
Source: Business Plus, Online, 2024

2. Results

The results of the study on food tourism behavior in Thailand found that 77.03% of people like to eat street food, 45.72% of local menus, 38.11% of safe table menus and local restaurants, 30.22% of Thai menus, and 13.12% of cafes. Udon Thani Province is a province in the upper northeastern region that is rich in beauty, natural resources, and tourist attractions. two World Heritage Sites, Ban Chiang World Heritage Site and Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, Udon Thani Province has a variety of Thai, Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese, and Phu Thai cultures, which have distinctive characteristics in terms of long history, culture, and way of life. It is a city of faith in the founder of Udon Thani, Prince Krom Luang Prachaksinlapakhom, and the sacred objects of the city of Pu Sri Phaya Nak Sri Suttho and Ya Sri Pathumma. Including the statue of Thao Wessuwan, which is considered a spiritual anchor and a center of faith for Buddhists in Udon Thani Province and people in neighboring provinces. In addition, Udon Thani is a special economic zone in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Khon Kaen Province, Udon Thani Province, and Nong Khai Province. It is a special economic corridor in the northeastern region that can connect the tourism economy, trade, and investment with 4 countries (Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and China) (Thaipost, 2020). When traveling, tourists want to try local dishes that are unique to Udon Thani Province. Therefore, it is the origin of this study. Tourism is the country's main industry. If we divide the tourism formats according to the World Tourism Organization (Perdomo, Y., 2009), there will be three main types of tourism: 1) Natural tourism format 2) Cultural tourism format 3) Tourism format in interests, with food tourism being one of the tourism formats that occur alongside tourism. Because eating is one of the main activities that tourists spend the most money and time on, about 1 in 3 of all travel expenses (Wintharat, 2017). In addition, food tourism is a trend that has gained popularity in 2018-2020, in which food is a tool to tell stories of each community in many ways, from history, culture, and local lifestyles. From surveys and research, it was found that the popular behavior of new-age tourists is to seek out new places that no one has ever been to (Off the Beaten Path), look for new local food, enjoy stories, and discover their abilities through

learning together with local people (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019). In 2014, UNESCO Creative Cities were divided into seven types, with the 7th type being the City of Gastronomy (Khoo.S. L., & Badarulzaman, N. 2014) Creative cities in the field of Gastronomics, cities of food science, and in 2015, the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports conducted a survey indicating that Thailand had an income of 456 billion baht from food tourism or 20 percent of the total income from tourism 174 billion baht came from Thai tourists and 282 billion baht from foreign tourists. The top 3 foreign tourists who spend money on tourism in the form of income from food and beverages during their trips are Chinese, British, and Russian. The 6 most popular Thai foods among tourists are Pad Thai, Spicy Shrimp Salad, Green Curry, Som Tam, Massaman Curry, and Tom Kha Gai (Manager, 2017, Online), as shown in Figure 1.

Picture 2: Image of Gastronomy Tourism
Source: bangkokbiznews.com

Identity of Food Tourism in Udon Thani Province

Local food is part of the government's soft power to promote tourism nowadays. Tourists must taste the local food of each destination. Udon Thani Province is famous as a part of religious and spiritual tourism (Mutelu), the Sai Mu people travel to pay homage to sacred objects in Udon Thani Province from all over the country. Food tourism is an alternative form of tourism in Udon Thani Province, especially, the Street Food Festival



every year. It is considered a multi-nation of food for tourist attractions. The local food of Udon Thani, which has its original recipes from different ethnic groups, has been prepared as local food. Udon Thani itself has many types of food for the taste of food when compared to other regions, is considered to have a mild taste. Most of it is salty, not sweet, medium, or spicy like Southern food. It consists of (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019).

1. Nam Nueang

When Udon Thani is available in many regions of Thailand, but who would have thought that if you want to eat delicious Nam Nueang, you must not miss eating it in Udon Thani only. Almost every famous restaurant must have Nam Nueang as a recommended menu in the restaurant. Nam Nueang menu can be bought to eat by yourself or bought as a souvenir. When you come to Udon thani, don't forget to order Nam Nueang to eat and taste the Isan style to the fullest. Whenever there is a meeting or seminar in Udon Thani province, "Nam Nueang" will be a menu on the dining table to welcome guests.

2. Khao Paik

Khao Paik is another delicious dish from Udon Thani that you can't miss. Judging from its name, it might not look very appetizing, but be guaranteed that it's delicious and made by Isan people. Khao Paik is a dish that doesn't contain any rice. It's similar to noodles. Udon people also call it Vietnamese noodles. It's a local food that is a famous original of Udon Thani province. The Vietnamese noodles are the highlight because they are fragrant and soft. It is served with soup and various side dishes such as spring onions, coriander, pork sausage, meat, and offal, you will have a delicious Khao Paik dish to eat.

3. Khai Kratha

The main meal that people cannot miss is breakfast, "eggs" are breakfast that helps to increase energy throughout the day. The famous egg menu of Udon Thani is "Khai Kratha", a famous menu that often becomes a favorite breakfast for many people. Hot pan-fried eggs come with minced pork, Chinese sausage, Udon pork sausage, sprinkled with spring onions, a little pepper, and a little sauce. It is a delicious breakfast like Udon people. Every time tourists visit, they order a pan-fried egg menu for breakfast almost every time. In addition to being famous, it also has complete nutritional value.

4. Khao Pad Kha Hom Whan Ban Chiang

Sweet and fragrant fried rice with galangal sauce has an unusual method of preparation. It starts with rice cooked in galangal water until the rice has a fragrant aroma of galangal. Then it is mixed with Ban Chiang's special 'sweet chili paste' before being stir-fried with pork fat and pork rinds. Add a touch of flavor by adding coriander and cooked garlic and stir-frying with the rice until it is well-cooked.

Sweet and fragrant fried rice with galangal sauce is perfect to eat with fresh vegetables such as kaffir lime leaves, fresh chili, coriander, and shallots. It can be said that this is a must-try menu of Ban Chiang.

5. Khao Tom Mad with red lotus

Our Isan style uses glutinous rice mixed with coconut, sugar, soybean seeds, black beans, taro or sweet potato, cut into small pieces, mixed, wrapped in banana leaves, filled with ripe bananas, placed on top with red lotus petals, wrapped into bite-sized pieces, steamed until cooked. Red lotus petals, although not very flavorful or fragrant, have medicinal properties, help nourish the brain, are a longevity drug, help resist free radicals, fight inflammation, protect the brain, restore memory, reduce stress hormones in the brain, and the hippocampus changes short-term memory into long-term memory. Khao Tom Mat with Red Lotus Petals is, therefore, a delicious snack with medicinal properties, and has the identity of red lotus flowers, which can be used to dye fabrics and make other products and menus. There is also the Red Lotus Sea, which is an important tourist attraction in Udon Thani Province.

6. Khanom Mai Morakot Nang Siew

These tiny pupae that many people don't dare to eat are considered another source of nutritional value because the pupae contain high protein. Especially a type of protein called "lecithin" which is beneficial in helping to nourish and develop the brain. In dried pupae, there is a high protein content of 48.98%. In addition, it is rich in vitamins B1 and B2. There are many minerals linoleic acid and linolenic acid, which are essential fatty acids that are beneficial to the body. It helps reduce blood fat and reduces the risk of heart disease.

7. Tum Lai Bua

Lotus stems are different from "lotus stems", many people may be confused. Lotus stems are the shoots of lotus flowers that are growing to become new plants. There are long stems

that are creamy white, vendors usually bundle them together or coil them into a circle, and lotus stems are brown stems. When you eat them, you have to peel off the outer skin first. One special characteristic of lotus stems is that they do not collapse when pressed like the more fragile lotus stems. Therefore, they are crunchy and absorb the flavors of the seasonings very well. They also have many properties. They are considered plants with a cooling effect, helping to reduce heat in the body, relieve fatigue, and nourish the heart. They help reduce brain stress, reduce cramps in the intestines and stomach, and are high in dietary fiber. They can also help relieve constipation.

8. Larb Ped Nong Dae Udon

Larb Ped Nong Dae Udon, in the past, people raised ducks to sell their eggs. Sometimes, the ducks did not lay eggs, which resulted in no income. So, this is a way to earn some money, it happened that a friend came to visit and made Larb Ped and added herbs from the fence to make it. It was impressed and decided to open a restaurant to sell Larb Ped. The Bang Phlad branch was selected to be the food for welcoming guests and used for catering meetings in the parliament.

9. Mham

Mham is another way to preserve food that gives a sour taste. At Wang Sam Mo District, there are both Mham Khai Pla and Mham Sai Pla marinated fish eggs and fish intestines with rice washing water, garlic, salt, sticky rice, marinating for 2-3 days, it will have a sour taste. Mham Khai Pla and Mham Sai Pla can be fried or steamed until cooked, then squeezed with lime, sliced shallots, and chili peppers, mixed with hot rice, or eaten with sticky rice, it is delicious. Or you can use it as an ingredient in omelets, which is another recommended menu.

10. Kaeng Whai

Rattan Soup is not easy to eat rattan curry because you have to endure the sharp thorns of rattan, a plant from the forest that has now become an economic plant that is widely grown and sold as processed shoots. The rattan used in rattan curry is the same type of rattan used to make woven products and furniture. If you use the part that is used to make food, choose to use young shoots, and all sharp thorns must be removed before boiling the curry. It is said that rattan curry is a food of the Phu Thai ethnic group who live along the Mekong River because their way of life is connected to the forest, which was an important food source in the past. In addition, it is believed that the bitter taste of rattan curry has the properties of an elixir of life. Rattan shoots are considered a valuable ingredient, so they are popularly eaten as a curry on special occasions, especially as a menu for welcoming guests. The overall appearance looks similar to bamboo shoot curry or boiled perch, but it has a bitter taste.

Factors affecting food tourism in Udon Thani Province

The researcher studied the following factors: books, academic journals, and online media, related research on the factors affecting the promotion of food tourism in Udon Thani Province follows: (Wimon, 2017).

(Sanchez-Canizares, S. M., & Lopez-Guzman, T., 2012, and Kim et al, 2009)

1. In terms of the location of local restaurants, the following should be done:

The place for preparing and eating food should be clean, tidy, and sanitary, with sufficient light, ventilation, exhaust fans, exhaust chimneys, shelves, tables used for cooking, tables, and chairs must be sturdy, and there should be a no smoking sign for safety for tourists. The toilets should be located in a suitable area of the shop with separate male and female

bathrooms. To maintain cleanliness there should be a sink for tourists to wash their hands as a standard for restaurants in food tourism attractions in Udon Thani Province.

2. In terms of food quality, the following actions should be taken: operators should focus on the quality of clean and sanitary food ingredients so that tourists and consumers can sense the cleanliness after washing. The food should be stored separately by type. The cooking process should include storing food on tables that are high from the floor. The food cabinets must use appropriate materials, and the water and utensils must be sanitary and have proper certification marks. The food should be stored in clean containers so that tourists can sense the cleanliness and have confidence in eating the food.

3. In terms of personnel, the following actions should be taken: The attire of food handlers should be healthy, free from infectious diseases and skin diseases, and have good hygiene in preparing, cooking, selling, and serving food to create standards for staff working in local restaurants to be friendly and support both Thai and foreign tourists.

4. In terms of containers and equipment (materials used, cleaning, and storage), the following should be done: Containers and equipment should be made from non-hazardous materials, easy to clean, and suitable for use. The operator of cleaning equipment must be high above the floor and have a hygienic storage area, which is an important part of creating a good image for food tourists in eating.

Hygiene

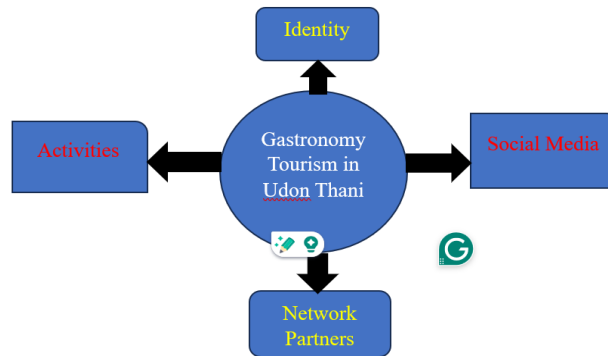
5. In terms of providing services to tourists, the following should be done: The operator should welcome tourists to local culture that is attractive, friendly, ready to provide services to tourists, ready to communicate and provide information to tourists in the vicinity, provide services to customers quickly and neatly inform the menu of food items with fair prices for tourists. To show food standard certification from relevant agencies to build confidence in tourists.

6. In terms of awareness, caring for, and responsibility for the environment, society, and culture should support products from local communities. Raw materials for the food menu come from local communities to create a story of that local menu. Staff should be responsible for tourists who come to use the services in the restaurant, which is a way to maintain a good image and reputation of the province should be aware of environmental management, and have a waste disposal system and wastewater treatment before releasing into the natural resources.

7. In terms of tourism experience, tourists want new experiences through learning through the 5 senses (sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch) that are different from the food they are familiar with in their daily lives. Local food is therefore an important element of the tourism experience, including emotional impacts and feelings. Food with a unique taste and deliciousness that creates satisfaction helps make the overall tourism experience memorable with the destination. Tourists can participate in local cooking activities with the local community.

Guidelines for promoting food tourism in Udon Thani Province

The researcher can summarize the guidelines for promoting food tourism in Udon Thani Province as follows:



Guidelines for promoting food tourism in Udon Thani Province consist of 4 aspects:

- 1. Identity of local food (Authenticity)** which local food of Udon Thani Province has ethnic diversity of people in the province, resulting in the creation of food menus, resulting in the identity of local food of Udon Thani that tourists who visit must taste local food, which is a good image of food tourism. Therefore, relevant agencies should support and maintain the identity of the original local cuisine of Udon Thani in each category to be a selling point for tourism in Udon Thani Province
- 2. In terms of activities,** local restaurants should be promoted to serve tourists in tourist attractions, souvenir shops, souvenirs in various locations, organizing local food festivals in Udon Thani Province, learning to cook, eating local food with local communities, food activities in important festivals and traditions of Udon Thani Province, and there should be training staffs, entrepreneurs, and communities to prepare for providing services to tourists, which has the potential to promote food tourism in Udon Thani Province.
- 3. In terms of social media,** there should be promotion of food tourism public relations through reviews from tourists, and guarantees of deliciousness from tourism influencers (Travel Influencers), which will make tourists aware of stories about food tourism in Udon Thani Province.
- 4. Networking:** Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to develop standards, food cleanliness to serve both Thai and foreign tourists, and cluster management of local food entrepreneurs to emphasize entrepreneurs' potential in producing, serving food, and conducting food tourism activities in Udon Thani Province.

3. Conclusion

From the study of relevant documents and research, it was found that local food promotion of Udon Thani Province should be promoted and supported through travel influencers and social media to make it known to tourists. In addition, the provincial tourism business association, relevant government agencies, and local restaurant operators should hold a meeting to discuss and find out the guidelines for joint operations to create consistency and provide information to tourists in the same direction. In addition, the Udon Thani Tourism Business Association and relevant government agencies should increase marketing promotion so that tourists will have a positive perception of the image and quality of local food in Udon Thani Province and will have a greater demand for food tourism. The study of the Malami Lang of Jong-Lai-Hong-Ding Yang-Ram, to synthesize it into knowledge. The background of local

food of Udon Thani province should be studied in all aspects to synthesize knowledge and be able to tell stories to tourists, including public relations, and being able to create a unique identity and value for the food.

Further recommendations

1. Tourism agencies, together with entrepreneurs, create a tourism image in terms of food in Udon Thani Province by upgrading and setting standards for local restaurants as well as maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene of restaurants to create confidence for tourists to use local restaurants in the province.

2. There should be advertising, public relations, and marketing promotion of local products, and famous souvenirs to enhance the quality of products and generate income for local communities in the province.

3. Promoting the organization of local food festivals to honor local culture through demonstrations of local food menus, and the presentation of food from each tribe by travel influencers (tourism influencers) to create an economy and generate income from food tourism.

4. There is training for personnel and tourism entrepreneurs in Udon Thani Province to be ready to accommodate food tourists, communicate the meaning of local food stories, and provide services to both Thai and foreign tourists to create international standards.

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