



## Examining Satisfaction Factors among Young Vietnamese Tourists: A Study of Traditional Cuisine in Hue City, Vietnam

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### Abstract

*The satisfaction of tourists plays a crucial role in enhancing the image of a tourist destination and influencing their decision to visit and revisit. Despite numerous global studies on this issue, there needs to be more research on factors influencing tourist satisfaction with traditional cuisine, especially for young Vietnamese tourists in a historic city like Hue, Vietnam. This study surveyed 250 young domestic tourists visiting Hue in early 2023 and included 12 semi-structured interviews with culinary experts, chefs, and tourism businesses. The results of hypothesis testing revealed that factors related to traditional Hue cuisine, such as Culinary Quality (CQ), Service Quality (SQ), Food hygiene and safety (HS), and Fair Price (FP), positively impact Customer Satisfaction (SAT). However, the factor of Restaurant Environment (RE) was rejected. Additionally, the interview results highlighted the significance of traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development. The study proposes policies and solutions to enhance tourist satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine. This research contributes to formulating management policies and promoting traditional cuisine as a crucial factor in attracting visitors to tourist destinations.*

**Keywords:** Traditional cuisine, young tourist, tourist satisfaction, Hue, Vietnam

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Travel demand is one of the decisive factors influencing destination choices as well as the satisfaction of travellers. In the current trend of overall development, the needs and purposes of travel have become more diverse. Travelers nowadays embark on journeys for sightseeing and relaxation, exploring and enjoying local cuisine at their destination (Chuang, 2009; Williams et al., 2014). Culinary experiences have become indispensable in exploring and understanding a destination's culture and lifestyle, gradually evolving into a primary purpose of travel (Tan & Lim, 2017; UNWTO, 2012). In recent years, there has been a trend among young travelers to allocate more time and expenditure toward unique food and beverage experiences. According to various surveys conducted by the World Food Travel Association [WFTA] (WFTA, 2018) and Hall & Sharples (2004), food and beverages account for 15% - 35% of the total expenditure by tourists.

Many studies indicate that gastronomy is crucial in determining strategies for building a tourist destination's image, brand, and intrinsic appeal (Rachão et al., 2019; Su & Horng, 2012; WFTA, 2018). This underscores the significance of cuisine as an integral part of the cultural identity of a destination (Jiménez-Beltrán, López-Guzmán, & González Santa Cruz 2016), influencing the motivations and experiences of tourists (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Furthermore, culinary tourism also impacts the socio-economic development of the local and national levels (Hall & Sharples, 2004).

In Vietnam, culinary culture is leveraged in tourism activities, mainly cultural experiential tourism. Culinary culture plays a crucial role in introducing traditional culture and connecting tourism services to create attractive products (Phạm, 2023). As a heritage city, Hue is a significant tourist center in Vietnam. The traditional cuisine of Hue is exceptionally diverse, bearing unique local characteristics shaped throughout its long history, primarily during the period

when Hue served as the imperial capital under the Nguyen dynasty. The distinctive dishes of Hue are not merely sustenance but a form of culinary art. Hue cuisine embodies elegance and simplicity, reflecting the royal and folk styles with captivating colors and flavors (Thúy, 2023).

Refining Preparation and presentation make diners appreciate the food through taste and sight. Through the culinary art of Hue, tourists can partially sense the refined, gentle, and sophisticated nature of the people of Hue. Visitors from all around aspire to experience Hue cuisine. Therefore, the culinary art of Hue is considered a tourism resource and a focal point of most tourism programs in Hue (Hữu et al., 2006).

Currently, most research on tourism in Hue focuses on exploring heritage aspects, but more attention needs to be paid to culinary tourism. Despite high consensus on the exceptional value of traditional Hue cuisine, there is a lack of studies assessing the influence of cuisine on young Vietnamese tourists' experiences in Hue. Additionally, there is scarce information on tourists' perceptions of culinary tourism in Hue based on demographic factors. Therefore, this paper uses quantitative models and structured interviews to explore factors influencing satisfaction related to traditional cuisine in Hue. It aims to contribute to the foundation for developing tourism strategies in Hue in general and attracting culinary tourists in particular. This research seeks to fill existing gaps in current studies and gain insights into the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development. Consequently, it proposes solutions to enhance the ability to attract tourists.

The next section of the paper reviews the relevant literature, the research area, and the research methodology. Following that are the research findings and the discussion section of the paper.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concepts of culinary tourism**

Although emerging recently, “culinary tourism” has undergone several conceptual changes. In the initial studies, culinary tourism focused on the “eating” experiences of tourists, as conceptualized by Long (1998) as “the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an Other...” Conversely, Wolf (2002) asserted that culinary tourism is related to “The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near.”

Today, culinary tourism is understood as any travel experience in which tourists learn about and experience the food heritage and culture of the destination, serving as a primary motivator for travel. Therefore, culinary tourism has expanded to include participating in cooking classes, food production, street food, local eateries, culinary events, and more (Alliance & Present, 2015; Hall & Mitchell, 2003; UNWTO, 2012; WFTA, 2023).

Regarding terminology, there is diversity in usage, such as “culinary tourism,” “food tourism,” “food-related tourism,” “gastronomic tourism,” “gastronomy tourism,” etc. According to Rachão et al. (2019), these terms are often used interchangeably in many studies. However, “culinary tourism” is prevalent in North America, “food tourism” in Australia and New Zealand, and “gastronomy tourism” in Europe. Besides the intrinsic focus on food in tourism, the differences among these terms reflect specific nuances in culinary tourism.

### **Role of culinary tourism**

Research has highlighted the crucial role of cuisine in tourism activities. In the UNWTO Global Report on Culinary Tourism (2017), food ranks third after cultural and natural factors in influencing tourists’ destination choices, with 87% of surveyed organizations identifying culinary tourism as a strategic

element for destinations. According to the World Food Travel Association's Report (WFTA, 2020), cuisine contributes 25% of the additional income for destinations.

Specific studies indicate that the dining service experience is a crucial factor with the potential to influence both the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of tourists. Therefore, cuisine can either promote or harm the destination's image and impact the repeat visitation/loyalty of tourists (Giao, 2022; Jiménez-Beltrán et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2012; Rimmington & Yüksel, 1998; Satchapappichit, 2020). The culinary tourism network is also considered a strategic element in developing tourism territories (Rachão et al., 2016).

Furthermore, studies on factors influencing tourists' satisfaction with local cuisine have also been widely conducted. For instance, Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) explore the correlation among motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty within culinary tourism, explicitly concentrating on culinary tourists engaging in cooking classes in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This investigation underscores the importance of motivation, culinary experience, satisfaction, and loyalty within the domain of culinary tourism, elucidating the interconnectedness among these pivotal factors and their role in formulating sustainable culinary tourism strategies. The findings reveal that the motivation of culinary tourists positively influences their culinary experience and satisfaction. Additionally, the culinary tourist experience positively correlates with both culinary tourist satisfaction and loyalty. This implies that heightened motivation among tourists to participate in cooking classes corresponds to an increased perception of experiential value and satisfaction. Furthermore, tourists' satisfaction and loyalty proportionally escalate as they encounter more diverse experiences during the cooking class.

Ali et al. (2020) investigated the factors influencing tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth (WOM) regarding the selection of

local foods in Pakistan. Data were collected from 286 respondents through a survey-based questionnaire, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were employed to establish a conceptual framework. The results indicate that food quality, perceived environmental quality, perceived value, and service quality significantly impact tourist satisfaction, while interpersonal interaction quality does not. Furthermore, satisfaction notably affects loyalty, subsequently influencing tourist WOM. This study provides valuable insights for practitioners and researchers in the tourism sector, aiding in informed decision-making and policy development to enhance the economic benefits of the tourism industry in Pakistan. It is also noteworthy for its pioneering exploration of WOM behavior in tourism research, highlighting the roles of satisfaction and loyalty. The findings underscore the substantial impact of food quality, perceived environmental quality, perceived value, and service quality on tourist satisfaction. However, interpersonal interaction quality is found to have an insignificant influence on satisfaction. Additionally, satisfaction significantly influences loyalty, and loyalty, in turn, substantially affects tourist WOM. In summary, the authors identify satisfaction and loyalty as critical contributors to the hypothesized model.

Thuy's study in 2023, which surveyed 280 domestic tourists in Hue, aimed to explore the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with local cuisine. The research employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method and applied the pull and push factors theoretical framework. The results indicated that perceived food quality, price, and tourist motivation to consume local food positively impacted tourist satisfaction, with perceived food quality emerging as the most significant factor. The study proposes practical measures to enhance tourist satisfaction with regional cuisine, including initiatives to raise awareness of food safety among tourism businesses, support for using local and healthy ingredients, ensuring transparent food pricing, and enhancing the narrative around food for tourists.

Further, Thuan, Chi, and Trung (2018) investigated the factors influencing international tourists' satisfaction with street food in Ho Chi Minh City. The research involved 203 international tourists and used linear regression analysis to assess these factors. The study found that the key factors affecting international tourists' satisfaction with street food, in order of importance, are food quality, food hygiene, price, food variety, staff attitude, food environment, food information, and food heritage. The research suggests policy recommendations for tourist agencies and authorities to enhance international tourists' satisfaction with street food.

In summary, while existing research provides valuable insights into the broad significance of cuisine in tourism, there is a need for more focused studies on the nuanced aspects of culinary experiences, the strategic implications of culinary networks, and comprehensive investigations into factors shaping tourists' satisfaction with local cuisine, especially in diverse culinary environments such as traditional food at a cultural, historical tourist destination.

### **Studies related to research models assessing satisfaction**

In the context of studies related to theoretical models assessing customer satisfaction with service quality in general, it is essential to mention the initial model by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and the subsequent adaptations by Cronin & Taylor (1992) and Parasuraman et al. (1996). Customer satisfaction is influenced by factors such as (1) Reliability, (2) Responsiveness, (3) Assurance, (4) Empathy, and (5) Tangibles. These factors, in general, evaluate the psychological aspects of customers after using a service. Moreover, many studies assess customer satisfaction based on factors that constitute the service/product. For culinary tourism, factors that contribute to customer satisfaction have been identified by studies conducted by Walker (2021), Ryu et al. (2012), Le (2016), Thuong et al. (2020), Satchapappichit (2020), Correia et al., (2008), Giao (2022), Raajpoot (2002). These factors include: 1) Food

quality, 2) Service quality, 3) Tourism facilities, and 4) Price

Each study employs different statistical techniques such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Le, 2016; Thuong et al., 2020), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Correia et al., 2008; Satchapappichit, 2020), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Giao, 2022), and Hierarchical Regression (Ryu et al., 2012). While these studies consistently identify factors influencing customer satisfaction through culinary tourism activities, some differences exist, such as 1) an inconsistent number of factors, 2) variations in the described variables, and 3) different degrees of influence of various factors. Additionally, food safety and security are crucial for culinary tourism, although few studies present them as independent factors. Based on the theoretical foundation and prior research experience, we propose a research framework for traditional cuisine in tourism development in Hue (see the following sections).

### **The proposed factors for this study**

#### ***Food quality***

The quality of cuisine encompasses external factors such as food's presentation, flavor, and nutritional value. Culinary quality is a crucial factor in food and beverage choices. When a dish ensures food safety, is aesthetically decorated and appealing, and provides ample nutrition while showcasing the distinctive flavors of the region, it enhances the overall dining experience. The unique feature of traditional cuisine in Hue is based on the principles of yin and yang, corresponding to the five elements: Cold (Water), Heat (Fire), Neutral (Wood), Savory (Metal), and Sweet (Earth). Whether in the high-end or everyday segments, traditional Hue cuisine is always prepared with a certain level of sophistication. Careful consideration is given to selecting ingredients and spices, aiming for a harmonious combination that appeals to various senses during the tasting experience. These elements contribute to traditional cuisine's



uniqueness, diversity, and solid cultural essence. The quality of the cuisine significantly impacts the satisfaction of visitors, one of the most crucial factors that profoundly affect tourists' overall contentment with the culinary experience. This uniqueness attracts tourists and enhances the effectiveness of culinary tourism development, contributing to the local tourism industry.

Hypothesis 1: The quality of cuisine positively influences tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***Service quality***

The style, service attitude, and professionalism of staff in food service establishments are factors within service quality and will positively impact the perception and satisfaction of tourists. In the service industry, service staff are the direct point of interaction with customers, representing the restaurant or hotel; hence, their attitude and service style is of utmost importance, significantly influencing the ability to attract customers. Additionally, the knowledge, demeanor, and outward appearance of service staff and their responsiveness and willingness to assist customers swiftly contribute to creating a favorable impression on tourists. This, in turn, attracts customers to restaurants and eateries and plays a role in leveraging traditional cuisine to develop local tourism.

Hypothesis 2 : The service quality positively influences tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***Tourism facilities***

Tangible factors are among the influential elements in shaping tourists' satisfaction, encompassing aspects from the surrounding environment to spatial layout and functionality. In addition to providing a spacious, well-ventilated, and clean environment, a restaurant or culinary establishment should foster a

friendly and attentive atmosphere with customers to leave a positive impression. This, in turn, encourages the intention of return visits and prompts visitors to recommend the place to friends and family. The space arrangement within a restaurant often captivates tourists and directly impacts customer satisfaction. Restaurants or culinary businesses should possess convenient and cozy facilities, coupled with appropriate decorations, as these factors significantly influence the likelihood of repeat visits by tourists and contribute to leveraging traditional cuisine in local tourism development.

Hypothesis 3 : Physical facilities positively influence tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***Food safety and hygiene***

Food safety and hygiene are crucial factors in the culinary business in general and culinary tourism in particular. Restaurants and culinary establishments must ensure the origin of raw materials, the health of food preparation and service staff, and compliance with standardized cooking processes. Food safety and hygiene are among the factors that impact tourist satisfaction and influence the exploration of traditional cuisine for local tourism development.

Hypothesis 4 : Food safety and hygiene positively influence tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***Fair price***

Pricing is the amount that customers pay for a service or product, representing the benefits customers receive. Pricing positively impacts customer satisfaction, as customers always consider the price when purchasing a product or service. Pricing is measured through tourists' perceptions and evaluations of the fairness and acceptability of the cost of the product or service

they receive. Clear and consistent pricing, without discrepancies between residents and tourists, increases tourist satisfaction. Pricing influences tourist satisfaction, and consequently, it can be concluded that pricing is a factor affecting tourist satisfaction and plays a role in leveraging traditional cuisine in tourism development.

Hypothesis 5 : Pricing positively influences tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***Satisfaction***

The satisfaction of tourists is the evaluation by tourists of a product or service that has met their needs and expectations. Tourists will compare their expectations with the experience, and when the experience exceeds their expectations, tourists feel delighted, indicating their satisfaction.

There are several research models for evaluating satisfaction and analyzing factors influencing tourist satisfaction in culinary tourism, including the SERVQUAL model measuring perceived service quality against expected service quality, the SERVPERF model focusing solely on perceived service quality, and the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) model. The authors chose the SERVPERF model in this study because of its convenience. This model does not require surveying tourists' expectations regarding service quality; instead, it concentrates on tourists' perceptions after consuming culinary tourism.

### **Study area**

Geographically, the city of Hue, and the province of Thua Thien Hue in general, lies centrally within Vietnam and serves as a central transportation hub. It boasts a comprehensive network of transportation modes, including roadways, railways, seaways, and air routes. These vital transport arteries link

Hue to both domestic and international destinations. Therefore, Hue is a strategically advantageous location for seamless access and connectivity to various domestic and global markets.



**Figure 1.** Proposed research model

**Source:** Authors' own

Historically, Hue-Phu Xuan was once Vietnam's political, cultural, and economic center for over 300 years. Today, Hue is recognized as a heritage city, encapsulating the essence and quintessence of the nation while preserving its distinct identity, known as the "Hue essence."

The culture of Hue is rich, diverse, and unique, encompassing various aspects, including culinary culture. Hue cuisine is the culmination of creative processes spanning generations, reflecting the cultural fusion of different regions. It carries profound cultural, historical, customary, and artistic values, representing the culinary culture of Vietnam yet maintaining a distinctive Hue flavor. Therefore, with its wealth of natural tourism resources, humanistic tourism resources, and exceptional culinary culture, Hue is well-positioned for the

development of tourism in general and culinary tourism in particular.



**Figure 2:** Location of Hue City in Vietnam

**Source:** Nguyen (2017)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Hue attracted many tourists, experiencing consistent growth. In 2019, Hue welcomed over 4.8 million visitors. The source of tourists to Hue was diverse, including domestic visitors from across Vietnam and numerous countries and territories worldwide. Hue also appealed significantly to international tourists, with a relatively balanced distribution between international and domestic visitors, as depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Tourist Arrivals to Hue from 2017 to 2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total number of tourist</b>	<b>3,800,012</b>	<b>4,334,673</b>	<b>4,817,076</b>	<b>1,687,740</b>	<b>691,571</b>	<b>2,050,279</b>
International tourist	1,501,226	1,951,461	2,186,747	558,841	22,735	263,034
Domestic tourist	2,298,786	2,383,212	2,630,329	1,128,899	668,836	1,787,245

**Source:** Department of Tourism Thua Thien Hue Province, 2023

Alongside the growth in tourist numbers, Hue's tourism revenue has also increased rapidly. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, tourist arrivals and tourism revenue have declined sharply in recent years. Although tourism activities are gradually recovering, the attraction of international tourists could be faster (Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 2:** Tourism revenue in Hue from 2017 to 2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total tourism revenue (approx)</b>	144	188	204	158	48	186

**Source:** Department of Tourism Thua Thien Hue Province, 2023

Regarding traditional cuisine in Hue, it is not an exaggeration to say that Hue is the cradle of Vietnamese cuisine, with about 60% of the dishes in the Vietnamese culinary repertoire originating from this region. Hue cuisine manifests the culture, locality, and art of living of the people here. Hue has three renowned culinary categories: Royal, Folk, and Vegetarian. Besides requiring fresh ingredients, Hue cuisine demands intricate preparation and exquisite presentation akin to an artistic masterpiece (Minh Hanh, 2016). Hue is situated along the Huong River in a valley, surrounded by forest-covered mountains to the west, marshes, and the sea to the east. The people of Hue combine the products from this distinctive geographical location to create a rich and diverse culinary art. As a political center of the dynasty for three centuries, the upper class in Hue developed a highly unique and sophisticated culinary culture. In the imperial court, cuisine was not only about satisfying hunger but also about appreciation of art and expression of social status. According to the *Dai Nam Thuc Luc*, a historical record compiled by the Nguyen Dynasty, the grand banquets hosted for foreign envoys or celebrations for successful scholars often consisted of 161 dishes, while smaller banquets had 50 dishes (Hue et al., 2023a; Huu et al., 2006).

The folk cuisine of Hue comprises everyday dishes prepared with the same level of intricacy as those in the royal cuisine. Hue's folk cuisine is diverse, heavily influenced by the distinctive characteristics of Central Vietnamese cuisine, and has a broad impact nationwide. Some traditional local dishes include grilled pork skewers (nem lụi), clam rice (cơm hến), Hue-style beef noodle soup (bún bò Huế), transparent shrimp and pork dumplings (bánh bột lọc), water fern cake with shrimp (bánh bèo tôm nhảy), rice flour cake with shrimp and pork filling (bánh lá chả tôm), savory fried rice cake (bánh khoai), pickled shrimp (tôm chua), dried fish stewed with sesame seeds (cá bóng rim khô), steamed rolled rice pancake (kẹo mè xừng), Hue-style sweet soup (chè Huế), and many more (Hue et al., 2023b; Huu et al., 2006). Hue is home to over 400 pagodas, with nearly 230 Buddhist monasteries, making vegetarian cuisine an integral part of Hue's culinary scene. Preparing vegetarian dishes has become a skill, as chefs require more talent and time to create enticing vegetarian meals. Vegetarian dishes in the Hue style reflect Buddhist principles and carry the influence of the royal court, offering a diverse, wholesome, and delicious dining experience that appeals to a wide range of preferences. Therefore, tourists of various beliefs and religions appreciate Hue's tasty and nutritious vegetarian meals (Hue et al., 2023a; Huu et al., 2006).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews) and quantitative methods (i.e., questionnaire survey) as the research problem contents both qualitative and quantitative aspects (Dewasiri et al., 2018). The qualitative research method included data collection and literature review to identify models, scales, and survey variables. In this study, the interviews were also conducted with experts in the tourism and culinary industry to explore culinary tourism activities in Hue. The authors conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with

culinary experts, chefs, and tourism businesses in May 2023 (Table 3). The interview questions focused on 1) the importance of traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development, 2) policies for preserving the value of traditional Hue cuisine, and 3) challenges and solutions to enhance tourist satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

**Table 3:** List of interviewees

No	Interview Code	Job description
1	Interviewee 1	Lecturer, Culinary Expert
2	Interviewee 2	Lecturer, Culinary Expert
3	Interviewee 3	Chef
4	Interviewee 4	Chef
5	Interviewee 5	Chef
6	Interviewee 6	Head of the restaurant department
7	Interviewee 7	Director –Travel Company
8	Interviewee 8	Deputy director - travel company
9	Interviewee 9	Deputy director - travel company
10	Interviewee 10	Tour operator
11	Interviewee 11	Tour operator
12	Interviewee 12	Tour guide

**Source:** Authors' own

The authors collected primary data through a survey questionnaire using the quantitative research method. We surveyed 250 domestic tourists visiting the city of Hue in early 2023, utilizing both online and face-to-face methods. Tourists were selected using purposive sampling, with the criterion being that they had consumed traditional Hue cuisine during their visit. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale (5 levels) ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) to measure tourists' perceptions of Hue's culinary culture. There were 27 observed variables across 6 factors, and demographic variables such as gender, age, and education level were also collected.



**Table 4:** Operationalisation of the variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Observed variables</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Culinary Quality (CQ)</b>	Food and drinks have delicious and attractive flavors (CQ1)	Nhu, Nguyen, & Ly (2014), Thuy (2023), Muskat, Hörtnagl, Prayag, & Wagner (2019)
	Unique dishes and drinks (CQ2)	
	Diversity and richness of dishes and drinks (CQ3)	
	Food and drinks have regional characteristics (CQ4)	
	Food and drinks are decorated majestically and beautifully (CQ5)	
	The menu is diverse and rich (CQ6)	
	Combine dishes properly (CQ7)	
<b>Service Quality (SQ)</b>	Dedicated, polite, and professional service skills (SQ1)	Thuy (2023), Muskat et al., (2019), Giao (2022), Quan & Wang (2004)
	The ability to communicate in foreign languages with international guests (SQ2)	
	Friendly and enthusiastic staff (SQ3)	
	The ability to understand customer needs and provide fast service (SQ4)	
	Problem-solving skills (SQ5)	
	Quick and efficient service, timely dish preparation, suitable timing (SQ6)	
	Feel safe when using the service (SQ7)	
<b>Restaurant Environment (RE)</b>	Convenient business location (RE1)	Thuy (2023), Muskat et al., (2019), Giao (2022), Bitner (1990), Ryu & Han (2011), Walker (2007)
	Comfortable, spacious, and well-ventilated space (RE2)	
	Attractive and suitable interior decoration (RE3)	
	Facilities such as parking lots and restrooms are available (RE4)	
<b>Food hygiene and safety (HS)</b>	Well-equipped with neatly organized tools and equipment (HS1)	Ali et al., (2020); Thuy (2023), Thuan et al., (2018 )
	Eating utensils and food storage tools ensure hygiene, preventing food contamination (HS2)	
	Cooks and service staff ensure the use of gloves, appropriate attire, and tidy hair (HS3)	

<b>Fair Price (FP)</b>	Prices are reasonable considering the quality of food and drinks (FP1)	Giao (2022), Satchapappichit (2020)
	Competitive pricing (FP2)	
	Diverse pricing options suitable for various customer segments (FP3)	
<b>Customer Satisfaction (SAT)</b>	Satisfied with the quality of service and products (SAT1)	Ali et al., (2020); Thuy (2023), Thuan et al., (2018 ), Giao (2022)
	Willing to recommend the cuisine to friends and family (SAT2)	
	Returning to Hue for the culinary experience (SAT3)	

**Source:** Authors' own

The collected data has been processed using SPSS 22 software with statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Multiple Regression Analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding exploring traditional culinary activities in the development of tourism in Hue City, the author surveyed domestic tourists who used dining services at culinary establishments in the city. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, and 240 were collected. Among them, 203 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis of the research results, as stated in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Characteristics of the survey sample

Characteristics		Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	120	59.1
	Female	83	40.9
Age	18 – year-old	6	3
	18 – 25 year-old	155	76.4
	26 – 40 year-old	35	17.2
	> 40 year-old	7	3.4
Educational background	High school	10	4.9
	Intermediate	68	33.5
	Professional, College		

Length of stay	Undergraduate	100	49.3
	Postgraduate	25	12.3
	2 days 1 night	45	22.2
	3 days, 2 nights	108	53.2
	Above 3 days	45	22.2
Number of visitation	A day trip only	4	2
	1	52	25.6
	2	100	49.3
	Above 2 times	49	24.1

**Source:** Authors' own

*Gender and Age:* Overall, it was observed that the male-to-female ratio was 59.1%, with males accounting for 59.1% and females for 40.9%. Customers aged 18-25 constituted the highest proportion at 76.4%, while customers under 18 and over 40 represented lower percentages.

*Educational Background:* According to the research findings, the largest group consisted of customers with a university degree, comprising 49.3%. Following this, customers with intermediate or college education accounted for 33.5%, those with postgraduate education constituted 12.3%, and those with a high school education comprised 4.9%.

*Duration of Stay:* Approximately 53.3% of customers indicated staying in Hue City for 3 days and 2 nights. The duration of 2 days and 1 night, as well as stays exceeding 3 days, shared a similar percentage at 22.2%, while 2% of customers reported not staying overnight but only visiting.

*Previous Visits to Hue City:* About 49.3% of tourists had visited Hue City twice, 25.6% stayed for the first time, and 24.1% had visited more than twice.

### **Validity and Reliability**

This study employs a Likert scale with 5 independent variables: food quality, service quality, physical facilities, food safety and hygiene, and pricing. The scale is considered acceptable when Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is  $\geq$

0.6; a higher Cronbach's Alpha coefficient indicates higher scale reliability. Variables with a total inter-item correlation  $< 0.3$  are candidates for removal, as a higher correlation suggests better quality of the observed variable. The test results of the components are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6:** The reliability of the scale for the independent variables

Factors	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Culinary Quality (CQ)	7	0,975
Service Quality (SQ)	7	0.973
Restaurant Environment (RE)	4	0,934
Food Hygiene and Safety (HS)	3	0,942
Fair Price (FP)	3	0,946
Customer Satisfaction (SAT)	3	0,936

**Source:** Authors' own

The standard for the factor analysis method is that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index must be greater than 0.5, and Bartlett's test must have a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . The results indicate that the KMO index is 0.845, more significant than 0.5, demonstrating that the data used for analysis are entirely appropriate. Additionally, Bartlett's test yields a significance level of  $p = 0.000$ , less than 0.05. This indicates that the observed variables are linearly correlated with the underlying factor.

**Table 7:** KMO and Bartlett Test

<b>Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy</b>		<b>0.8450</b>
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2654.430
	df	276
	Sig.	0.000

The total variance extracted value is 73.179%, which exceeds the 50% threshold, meeting the required criterion.

**Table 8:** Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.579	30.314	30.314
1	3.220	12.880	43.194
3	2.807	11.230	54.424
4	2.458	9.830	64.254
5	2.231	8.924	73.179

The total variance extracted is 73.179%, which exceeds the 50% threshold, satisfying the requirements. These five factors collectively explain 73.179% of the variation in the data.

### Model testing results

To affirm the relationship and the extent of influence of the factors on tourist satisfaction, a linear multiple regression analysis was conducted based on the results of the correlation analysis. After inputting the 5 independent variables into the regression analysis, the results are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

**Table 9:** ANOVA test results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	167,649	5	33,530	187,656	0,000
Residual	35,199	197	0,179		
Total	202,848	202			

**Source:** Authors' own

The results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the regression model show a significance level (F Sig.) of 0.000 (less than 0.05), indicating that the regression model is suitable for the collected data and the variables included are statistically significant at a 5% significance level. Therefore, the independent variables show a relationship with the dependent variable.

**Table 10:** The results of the regression analysis

Independent variables	Dependent variable	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> adjustment	Sig.	Conclude
Culinary Quality (CQ)				0,006	Accept
Service Quality (SQ)				0,035	Accept
Restaurant Environment (RE)	Satisfaction	0,826	0,822	0,106	Rejected
Food Hygiene and Safety (HS)				0,000	Accept
Fair Price (FP)				0,000	Accept

**Source:** Authors' own

The regression results of the model show that the value R<sup>2</sup> (R Square) = 0.826; this means that the model's suitability is 82.6% or, in other words, about 82.6% of the effects of the components considering tourists' satisfaction with Hue traditional cuisine. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value (Adjusted R Square) more accurately reflects the model's fit for the whole population; we have an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.822 (or 82.2%), which means a regression model exists—a linear relationship between tourist satisfaction with traditional cuisine in Hue City and influencing factors. The facilities variable has a sig T-test value of 0.106 > 0.05, so this variable is not meaningful in the regression model; in other words, this variable has no impact on the dependent variable. The remaining variables, including Cuisine Quality, Service Quality, Food Hygiene and Safety, and Price, all have a T-test sig less than 0.05, so these variables are all statistically significant and impact the dependent variable, Satisfaction. The regression coefficients of the independent variables are all positive; the independent variables positively impact the dependent variable. Therefore, hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>5</sub> are accepted, and hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> is rejected.

### Findings from interviews

The interview results are presented through three main topics: 1) The significance of traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development; 2) Policies for

preserving the value of traditional Hue cuisine; 3) Limitations and solutions to enhance tourist satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine.

### ***The importance of Hue traditional cuisine in tourism development***

Concerning the significance of traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development, many interviewees emphasized that Hue cuisine plays a crucial role in preserving heritage for future generations, promoting tourism activities, and boosting economic benefits. Traditional Hue cuisine holds significant cultural and lifestyle values for the local people. Therefore, it is indispensable in developing tourism, creating essential interactions between hosts and tourists. Interviewee 1 stated:

*“Hue cuisine is about satisfying hunger and enrichment, promotion, and economic benefits. Hue cuisine offers a diverse array of dishes with exquisite flavors. As the former imperial capital, Hue boasts a distinctive feature in its cuisine, particularly the royal cuisine. There is a treasure trove of royal culinary heritage in Hue. Traditional Hue cuisine embodies significant cultural and lifestyle values for the local people”.*

Interviewees 5 and 6 stated, *“Hue cuisine is an indispensable component in developing tourism in Hue. Because cuisine is an integral part of tourism products. Hue cuisine is highly diverse and appealing, with many famous and unique dishes that reflect the regional characteristics unmatched by any other place. Hue cuisine is one of the factors that attracts tourists”.*

It can be said that when tourists visit Hue, in addition to the historical landmarks, they come to savor the essence of Hue cuisine. Hue cuisine is meticulous and sophisticated, from its preparation to how it is enjoyed. Hue cuisine holds high historical value and reflects the people's character in this ancient capital. As shared by Interviewee 3:

*“Hue cuisine is an indispensable and irreplaceable factor in the development of tourism in Hue because it has its roots in the ancient imperial court, bearing its own distinctive and enduring characteristics, not only of the people of Hue but also of the Vietnamese people as a whole.”*

Interestingly, traditional Hue cuisine is markedly different from cuisine in other places because it is very authentically Vietnamese. Most dishes and beverages have historical significance and unique stories. Hue cuisine is considered the cultural heritage of Vietnam. It captivates with the sophistication of its dishes, from ingredient selection to preparation. Hue cuisine is diverse in terms of both dishes and unique preparation methods. The royal cuisine of Hue is exceptionally creative in its presentation, intricate, and aesthetically pleasing. The royal cuisine has distinctive characteristics, and even the everyday folk cuisine is captivating and engaging for visitors.

Hue cuisine is generally renowned for its intricately decorated presentation and affordable prices. It is also celebrated for its diversity, showcasing the lifestyle and culture of the local people. This makes Hue cuisine an indispensable tourism product, contributing to the region's development.

### ***Policy to preserve Hue's traditional culinary values***

Many opinions suggest the need to intensify communication efforts when asked about the relevant policies needed to conserve traditional Hue cuisine's values and preserve them for tourism development. Specifically, this involves promoting the image of Hue cuisine through travel businesses, building and managing the brand, and setting prices suitable for different customer groups. Additionally, organizing food-related exhibitions and fairs domestically and internationally effectively promotes traditional Hue cuisine to the global audience. For instance, Interviewee 5 stated:



*“Boost the promotion of Hue cuisine, connect with travel businesses within and outside the province to promote the image of Hue cuisine. I am particularly enhancing the promotion of Hue cuisine on the internet and social media to reach a wider audience. Establish reasonable prices for Hue cuisine to cater to different tourist groups. Develop traditional food villages and tourism programs”.*

Furthermore, Interviewee 6 emphasized the importance of having management agencies and organizations position and exploit characteristic Hue cuisine products for tourism. Ensuring food safety, hygiene, and the infrastructure serving tourists is crucial and meeting standards and diverse customer needs is crucial.

### ***Limitations and suggestions to improve tourist satisfaction with Hue traditional cuisine***

Regarding the limitations in the quality of Hue cuisine, many interviewees believe that in Hue, most local eateries are set up in markets and on sidewalks, making it challenging to control the quality of the food. Without guidance from locals, tourists may quickly end up in low-quality establishments with high prices, as described by Interviewee 3.

Therefore, the solution proposed by Interviewee 6 is the need for a management agency or organization to identify characteristic Hue cuisine products and incorporate them into tourism exploitation. Additionally, planning is required to organize restaurants and eateries serving traditional Hue dishes, ensuring adherence to Hue’s flavors and maintaining food safety and hygiene standards to serve tourists.

Moreover, many opinions suggest the necessity of enhancing both the quantity and quality of the service staff in this sector. Currently, the service personnel in restaurants and eateries often need more professionalism and

language proficiency and have limitations in their service attitude. Therefore, changes are required to increase professionalism and hospitality to meet customer satisfaction and retention, as Interviewees 4, 9, and 12 shared.

Concerning limitations and solutions regarding promoting traditional Hue cuisine, Interviewee 6 notes that although the Hue Festival is regularly organized, online promotion activities still need to be improved. Local food businesses and authorities need a more coordinated effort to promote Hue cuisine. Promotion activities often occur independently, requiring more depth and tight linkage to create food tours. Additionally, many food businesses vary in quality, have tiny scales, and cannot meet the demands of many tourists. Issues related to food safety and hygiene persist.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study assesses the satisfaction of young Vietnamese tourists with traditional Hue cuisine by examining factors related to Culinary Quality (CQ), Service Quality (SQ), Restaurant Environment (RE), Food Hygiene and Safety (HS), and Fair Price (FP). Additionally, the research captures the perspectives of culinary experts, chefs, and tourism businesses regarding the importance, conservation policies, and challenges associated with traditional Hue cuisine in tourism development.

The analysis and testing of factors influencing tourist satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine reveal support for four hypotheses: H1, H2, H4, and H5. These findings align with previous studies by Ali et al. (2020) and Thuan et al. (2018), where factors such as food and service quality positively influenced tourist satisfaction. Similarly, this study is in line with the results of Thuy (2023), indicating that factors such as food quality, perceived price, and tourist motivation to consume local food positively impact tourist satisfaction, with perceived food quality being the most significant factor.

Regarding the interview results, it can be stated that traditional Hue cuisine is renowned for its diversity, richness, uniqueness, and visually appealing presentation. However, there are certain limitations, notably in fully capitalizing on potential values, particularly those tied to traditional Hue cuisine's cultural and historical aspects. While traditional Hue cuisine encompasses Imperial, folk, and vegetarian dishes, there still needs to be challenges in fully integrating its values into tourism activities.

The introduction and promotion of Hue cuisine primarily through word of mouth necessitate broader dissemination through mass media, including social media. Traditional cakes, vegetarian dishes, and Imperial cuisine are not distinctly highlighted and need more emphasis. It can be argued that cuisine can either promote or harm the destination's image, impacting the repeat visitation/loyalty of tourists, as mentioned in previous studies (Rimington, Yüksel, 1998; Ryu et al., 2012; Giao, 2022; Jiménez-Beltrán et al., 2016; Satchapappichit, 2020).

Furthermore, collaboration among entities to organize and promote the values of traditional cuisine to domestic and international tourists still needs to be improved. There is a need for broader promotion in travel publications, brochures, and the organization of culinary festivals, food fairs, skill competitions, and culinary exhibitions. Additionally, organizing food tours to explore local cuisine and sightseeing tours and involving tourists in preparing traditional dishes with residents or culinary artisans are essential.

In general, the city of Hue, and specifically restaurants and eateries, require detailed plans for training their staff to enhance professional skills, soft skills, and language proficiency for improved communication with international visitors, thereby enhancing service quality. Experienced service personnel will not only elevate the quality of service but also attract more tourists. Furthermore, there should be a focus on training chefs and developing

a pool of culinary experts and artisans to preserve and promote the values of traditional Hue cuisine. Preserving cooking secrets, traditional recipes, and the essence of conventional cuisine are foundational for leveraging cuisine in tourism development. Additionally, effective food safety management is crucial to ensure the health of tourists. Controlling prices, setting reasonable pricing, planning and zoning for culinary establishments to prevent fraudulent activities, as well as upgrading infrastructure to meet the demands of many tourists are also essential considerations.

## **CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

In conclusion, this study has analyzed the factors influencing young Vietnamese tourists' satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine in the context of tourism development. Additionally, it has sought insights from culinary experts, chefs, and businesses regarding this matter, providing a direction for developing culinary tourism in Hue. The results of hypothesis testing indicated that factors such as Culinary Quality (CQ), Service Quality (SQ), Food hygiene and safety (HS), and Fair Price (FP) positively influence Customer Satisfaction (SAT) about traditional Hue cuisine. However, the Restaurant Environment (RE) factor was found to have no significant impact. The interviews underscored the importance of conventional Hue cuisine in tourism development. The study suggests policies and solutions to enhance tourist satisfaction with traditional Hue cuisine, contributing to formulating management policies and promoting traditional cuisine as a pivotal factor in attracting visitors to tourist destinations.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Regarding the proposed research model, previous studies have utilized various factors and statistical techniques, such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Le, 2016; Thuong et al., 2020), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

(Correia et al., 2008; Satchapappichit, 2020), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Giao, 2022), and Hierarchical Regression (Ryu et al., 2012), in their investigations. These studies consistently identify factors influencing customer satisfaction in culinary tourism activities. Consequently, our study integrates food safety and security factors, along with food quality, service quality, tourism facility, and price, into our model. Therefore, when selecting factors to evaluate customer satisfaction related to traditional cuisine, it is essential to consider the relationships among various factors combined. In addition, our research has also considered listening to stakeholders' perspectives in accurately assessing the importance of traditional Hue cuisine and existing challenges and proposing solutions to best leverage this unique resource in overall tourism development and the preservation of culinary and cultural values. This study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to enhance the reliability and diversity of research outcomes.

### **Practical Implications**

The research provides valuable insights for managing and planning traditional Hue cuisine development. It contributes to the establishment and promotion of the destination through the unique cultural aspect of its cuisine. Integrating the internet and social media for communication, alongside events like food festivals and experiential classes, is a comprehensive strategy to attract and engage a diverse audience. Ultimately, leveraging multimedia platforms, including videos and television programs, can play a pivotal role in promoting traditional Hue cuisine and educating locals and the younger generation. Creating culinary experience tours and disseminating detailed information through various channels further enhances the tourist experience.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study applied quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and process data, it still has certain limitations. First, the research only gathered survey data from domestic tourists who had visited Hue. Therefore, future studies could broaden the survey scope to include international tourists. Second, while this study examined five factors influencing tourists' satisfaction with Hue cuisine, it overlooked the motivation factor. Hence, future research could explore additional factors and analyze more relationships between variables. Third, despite conducting semi-structured interviews to complement survey results, the sample size remains small, and the interviewees are not sufficiently diverse. Consequently, future studies may continue to explore a more comprehensive range of stakeholders, including local government and travel businesses.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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