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## ENHANCING INDONESIAN CULINARY TOURISM THROUGH THE DIVERSITY OF INDONESIAN FOODS

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### ABSTRACT

With more than 1,200 different ethnicities, Indonesia remains the most diverse country the world could offer. With such a large scope of cultural diversity, eating habits and norms can vary in each province or even city. There are a few of Indonesian cuisines that have already penetrated the international market. From the world class nasi padang from the Minangkabau tribe to papeda from the far east island of Papua, Indonesia offers millions of variations in processing food and daily necessities. However, many other foods and delicacies are still under the radar and lack of acknowledgement from the outside world. The calibre of what Indonesia can contribute to the world of cuisines is beyond belief. This thesis will discuss the importance of respecting and learning other cultures, furthermore, how food can contribute to the unity and tourism sector of this country. The calibre of what Indonesia can contribute to the world of cuisines is beyond belief.

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## INTRODUCTION

Food has always been paramount of basic human necessity, listed as part of the psychological needs or the foundation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, ever since Adam and Eve. As time goes on, food has become more than just a part of daily needs. The natural human instinct of curiosity combined with the ever-growing globalization has shaped how we, as a global citizen, perceived food not only as daily needs but as part of our identity.

Take a look at a fish, for example. In western countries, fishes are often cooked pan-fried or deep-fried. On the other side of the world, especially in Japan, fishes are

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mostly eaten raw. This distinguished attitude defines how consuming foods shapes cultural identity and establishes the uniqueness that every community from different regions possess, locally and globally. Thus, what kind of food we eat may reflect what sort of identity we have, and describes the term culinary, a concept that symbolizes food as part of a cultural element.

As time goes on, the ever-growing globalization opens up the opportunity for people from different backgrounds to explore new places and experience new adventures, including tasting new flavors of unique culinary unfamiliar to their tongue. Moreover, it opens up the opportunity for people to set up places that offer foreign cuisine in their hometown, allowing more local people to experience these unfamiliar flavors and giving travelers a sense of belonging as they are far away from their home. Hence, food can be acknowledged as a medium for communities from different backgrounds to understand and communicate.

The potential of food, or rather, culinary as a cultural identity, cannot be neglected. The diverse culinary spread worldwide definitely attracts people from various backgrounds to step outside from their home country to visit foreign nations with one main goal in mind: to explore and experience different kinds of exotic cuisines. Indeed, we don't necessarily have to travel abroad to enjoy foreign cuisines as many restaurants offer the same cuisines around us. Moreover, thanks to globalization, we can search for any food recipes just by the touch of a finger, allowing us to make those foreign cuisines right in our home. However, our instinct of greed and curiosity pushes us to explore further, raising the question, "How does this food taste like if we eat it in its country of origin?". This mindset brings people to explore further by traveling to the origin countries of their favorite foreign cuisines. But, what exactly are these foreign travelers craving for local cuisines that will benefit the country? To answer that question, let's take a look at Japan.

With its food, Japan has always been a worldwide recognition, as there are almost no countries that don't serve Japanese restaurants and no people that don't recognize Japanese food. How Japanese food is served differently, especially for seafood cuisines, triggers interest amongst people around the world. Thus, the amount of people interested in Japanese foods keeps increasing, tempting local entrepreneurs to establish Japanese restaurants. However, no matter how delicious and abundant Japanese restaurants are in their region, people keep on flocking Japanese cuisines straight in the country of origin. As a result, the number of foreign travelers entering Japan has continuously been rising since 2012, with approximately 8 million travelers to almost 32 million travelers visiting Japan in 2019 (JNTO). Moreover, 76.6% of the total travelers reported that their purpose of traveling to Japan was motivated by its cuisines, triggering local entrepreneurs to establish restaurants all across Japan that offer local specialties. As a result, more than 890,000 Japanese restaurants spread across the nation, with Tokyo, the capital city, possessing the most restaurants per capita and 308 Michelin-starred restaurants, ranked Tokyo as the city with most Michelin stars in the world (Hoffman, 2019). If we observe a larger scale, the ever-growing number of travelers contributes to approximately 7 percent of Japan's GDP, excluding all the income and taxes generated from the cuisines industry (Knoema, 2019). Thus, it can be said that as a whole, Japanese cuisines as a cultural identity attracts people from around the world to try and experience it right in the country of origin, which significantly influences Japan's economic growth and citizens' welfare.

What about Indonesia? With more than 5,000 different kinds of cuisines from various regions, Indonesia is ranked as one of the countries that offers the most diverse

culinary identity (Wijaya, 2019). Furthermore, as part of an Asian country, almost every Indonesian cuisine is made with different kinds of spice, offering rich and adventurous flavors that western cuisines are knowingly lacking. This richness of spice flavor on almost every Indonesian cuisine attracts lots of foreigners to explore the taste they have never tried before, and even the world renowned media company CNN, labeled two of the most popular Indonesian dishes, *Rendang* and *Nasi Goreng* as the CNN World's Best Food: Reader Choices, ranked #1 and #2 respectively. Theoretically, having the number one and number two best food in the world ranked from a credible media source is a perfect momentum for boosting Indonesian cuisines' exposure to the world, attracting foreign travelers to visit Indonesia to explore and try local cuisines, which directly impact Indonesia's economic growth and citizen's welfare. However, the reality says otherwise.

Indeed, there is no doubt that Indonesian cuisines are chart-topping in Indonesia since almost all citizens tend to eat local cuisines on a daily basis. The existence of restaurants specializing in Indonesia cuisines are spread across the country, ranging from street food filled with colorful hawker up to the poshest, full course fine dining establishment lined up in major arterial roads. Thus, there is no such thing as lack of Indonesian cuisines options. Unfortunately, it is not the same case overseas. Although two of the most popular Indonesian cuisines ranked at top of the World's Best Food, almost no foreigners are even talking about it unless they are either Indonesians living overseas or food experts delving for Asian cuisines. The number of Indonesian restaurants overseas cannot be compared with the supposed-to-be "less popular" Japanese restaurants due to how little they are. Moreover, whether it is ironic or not, the most well-known Indonesian "cuisines" is *Indomie*, an instant fried noodle, which doesn't showcase the authentic taste of Indonesian cuisines.

The lack of acknowledgement of Indonesian cuisines is pretty similar to how foreigners tend to recognize 'Bali' but not 'Indonesia', wasting the absolute potential to enhance Indonesian tourism and economic growth. This situation brings into question, what really caused Indonesian cuisines to have lack of acknowledgement albeit having prestigious awards? And is it possible to improve it as Indonesian cultural identity to further enhance its tourism and economic growth?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary in this context refers towards the food that is found within the culture of a country (IGI Global, n.d). This is seen in how the variety of foods that a certain culture finds on the daily, and how this has shaped the lives and daily routine of the people living within them. Therefore in how culinary is used in Indonesia food, is how this defines the food that is in Indonesia. This also includes Indonesian food in other countries, and how it still has their identity in another country.

Cultural identity is the characteristics that a certain culture shares, and how the people within that culture identify within said culture (National Geographic, n.d). The characteristics that people identify with may include but not limited to Food, Languages, values, and also birth place. A cultural identity then is the one that the food that each country takes, for them to take on the characteristics of the culture that they represent.

Social diversity is how many cultures that exist within one region, and the interactions between them (Lumen Learning, n.d). This can see them intermingling with each other, and create a dynamic between them, or the seeing them not interacting at all. In this context, Social diversity is seen in how cultures affect each other in the creation of

food, and how the existence of another culture amongst another can then influence on the final results themselves.

Tourism are the activities of people traveling outside of their daily environment with reasons such as leisure, business, or other purposes for less than one year (Go2HR, 2019). Here it is used on how tourism also affects the food of a country, by the consumption of the many types of people from different backgrounds and cultures, and how such interaction then can affect how the food is made.

Economic impact is the effect that a project or business had towards a certain location (Law Insider, n.d). This is then related towards how the impact that tourism gives, and how the culinary sector has an effect towards it, in how it can give a larger impact towards tourism in how it can attract more people towards this sector.

## **METHOD**

To analyze what really caused the lack of acknowledgment and how to improve the exposure of Indonesian cuisines, we opted to conduct primary and secondary research as our choice of methodology to collect all data and information we need. Primary research is the type of methodology where we, as a researcher, collects the required data first-hand, meaning conducting the research by ourselves. This type of research consists of surveys which requires us as a group to reach out to potential participants that understand the local culinary industry in Indonesia. Furthermore, we understand that every region in Indonesia has different approaches to culinary, therefore we target people from various cultural backgrounds in order to prevent data bias. As of our method of reaching out to potential participants in the midst of social distancing, we utilized an online form, Google Form to be exact, as our main media to conduct surveys. By utilizing online form, we can easily share and collect our survey to virtually anywhere in the world while keeping social distance with others. Inside the survey, we only prepared questions that we consider as important data for our research and thus, no frivolous questions are inputted that could make them reluctant to fill the survey. After that, each of us spread the survey by sharing it through our personal social media as it is the most effective way to reach potential participants. To avoid data bias, we target the number of participants as much as possible.

Of course, collecting data from surveys would not be enough. Due to that cause, we also conduct secondary research, a type of methodology where we collect and analyze existing data. In other words, Instead of generating data like in primary research, secondary research relies on analyzing the data that already exist in any kind of form. By doing so, we can analyze all kinds of data and information that would be difficult for us to generate first hand, such as information regarding the actual economic growth and impact caused by travelers and culinary for instance. In order for us to collect all relevant data and information, we specify all of our searching to key words that are related to this study, which includes culinary, cultural identity, tourism, economic impact, social benefits, and other related words. By doing so, we can find and explore required information as efficiently as possible. Of course, to avoid any false information, we limit our scope of research to only rely on credible sources, meaning no blog website, dubious news portal, and else.

Although the name suggests otherwise, we conduct both primary and secondary research simultaneously in order to gain background knowledge while preparing all questions needed to be answered without having to sacrifice time management. After all data and information is collected, each of us analyze every bit of it in order to retrieve important findings that would be beneficial to this journal.



In your opinion, what is the most underrated Indonesian food(s)?

36 responses

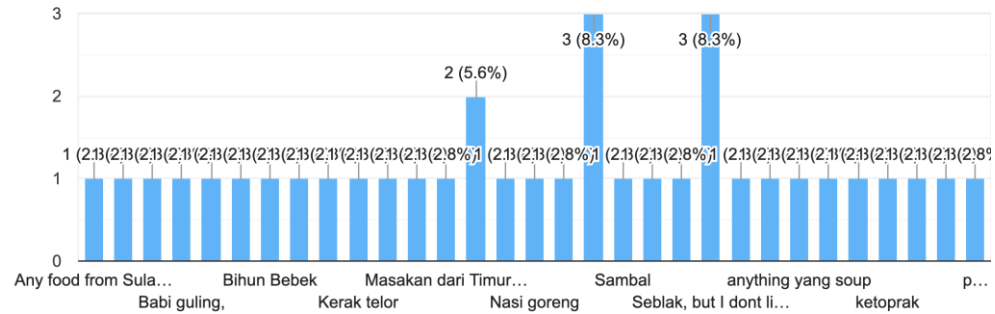


Figure 1.3: Question “In your opinion, what is the most underrated Indonesian food(s)?”

Apart from the most popular dishes, the participants were asked what is the most underrated Indonesian cuisine. Unexpectedly, almost every participant answered various kinds of cuisines, ranging from *kerak telur*, *ketoprak*, *sambal*, *babi guling*, and other dishes that even some of us haven't heard of such as *lawar*, *kuku macan*, *kapurung* and *lamang tapai*, which clearly shows that Indonesian has an exotic range of cuisines that even locals doesn't know. Thus, leading us towards the next question.

What part of Indonesia do you think has the most unique cuisine?

36 responses

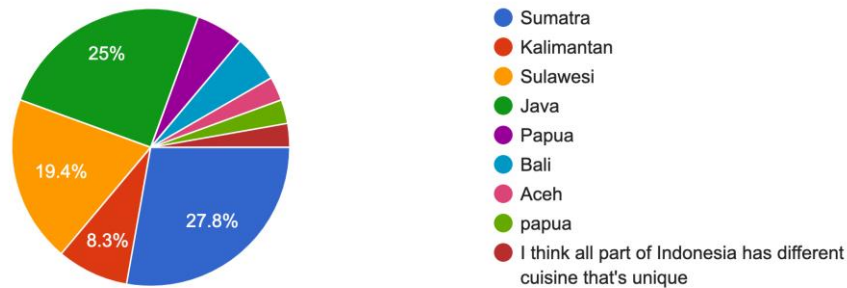


Figure 1.4: Question “What part of Indonesia do you think has the most unique cuisine?”

What are the names of that unique cuisine?

36 responses

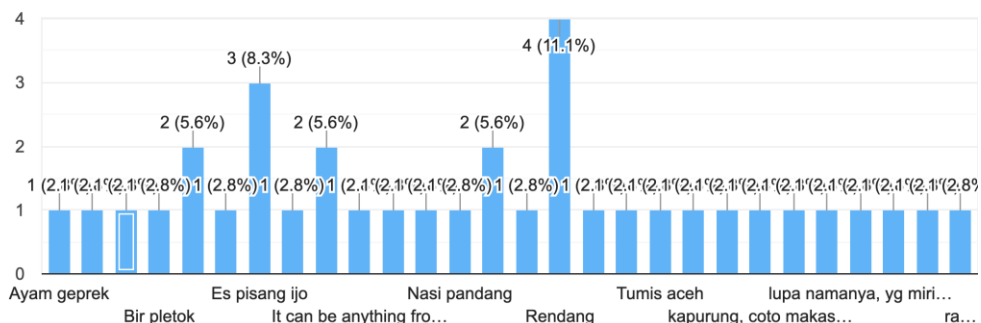


Figure 1.5: Question “What are the names of that unique cuisine?”

These combined questions were asking participants what are the most unique Indonesian cuisines and which part of Indonesia that offers those cuisines. The result is

pretty surprising, as all of the participants filled in diverse kinds of unique cuisines from all regions of Indonesia, stretching from the far west of Sabang to the far east of Merauke, which means that every participant acknowledged unique cuisines that even the most remote region has to offer. This also means that there is no single region of Indonesia that doesn't offer unique cuisines. However, do all of these cuisines have the potential to boost Indonesia's tourism, especially in the culinary sector?

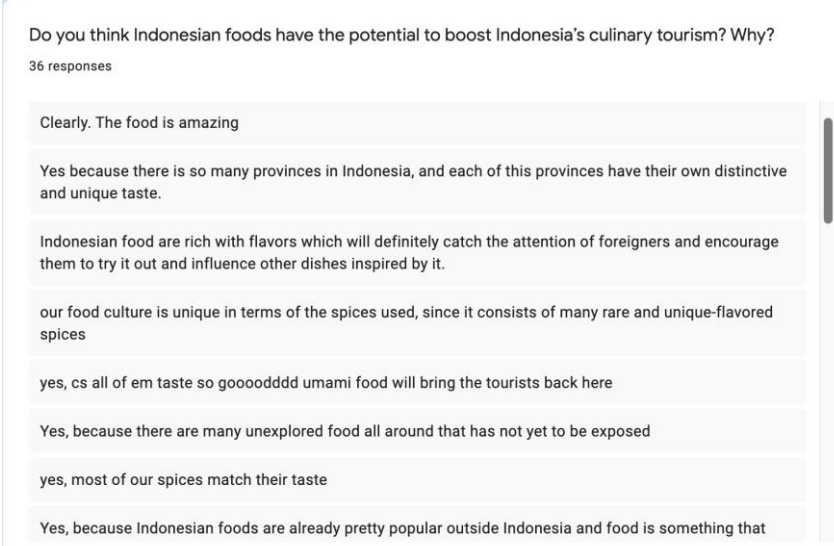


Figure 1.6: Question “Do you think Indonesian foods have the potential to boost Indonesia’s culinary tourism? Why?”

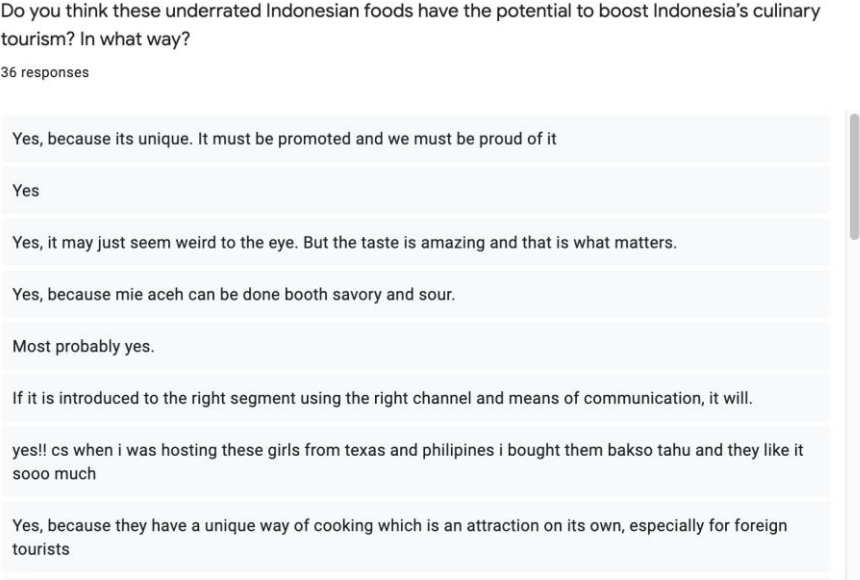


Figure 1.7: Question “Do you think these underrated Indonesian foods have the potential to boost Indonesia’s culinary tourism? In what way?”

Do you think these unique cuisines have the potential to boost Indonesia's culinary tourism? Why?

36 responses

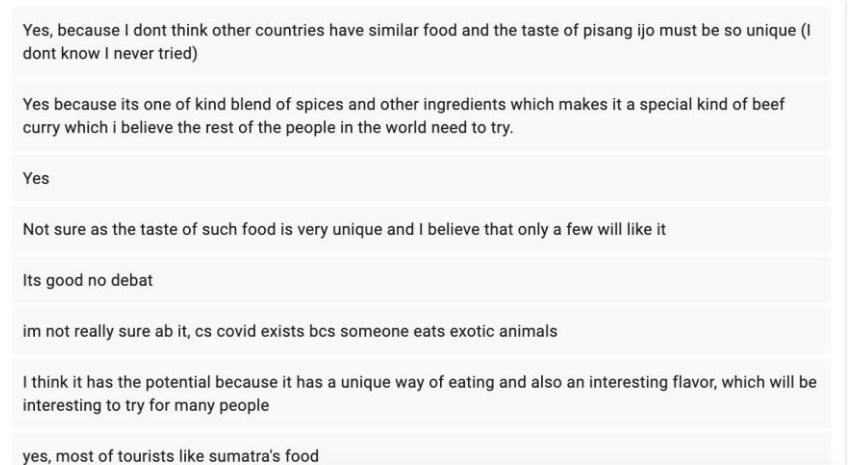


Figure 1.8: Question "Do you think these unique cuisines have the potential to boost Indonesia's culinary tourism? Why?"

We asked participants whether or not Indonesian cuisines have the potential to boost Indonesia's tourism, especially in the culinary aspect. Fortunately, all 36 participants answered yes, meaning they believe that Indonesian cuisines can definitely benefit Indonesia's culinary tourism development. The participants also believe that underrated and unique Indonesian cuisines that even some locals are not aware of will definitely attract foreigners' appetite to try them, meaning that even the under-the-radar Indonesian cuisines as cultural identity have the potential to engage foreign travelers to visit Indonesia to explore and experience local delicacy.

Nonetheless, even though the local participants are aware of the existence of under-the-radar Indonesian cuisines, it doesn't spread internationally. One of the main reasons is the lack of international acknowledgment. Even though a lot of media has been placing Indonesian cuisines in the spotlight for years, the direct influence of it is still unheard of. So why does this happen? To answer that question, let's take a look and compare the current condition between Indonesia and Japan, the country that holds the title of the most recognizable cuisines in the world.

Ever since a long time ago, Japan has been a developed country, resulting in Japan possessing a strong and stable economic condition (Drucker, 2014). This happens due to the fact that almost Japanese industries have always been popular in the global market, shaping how foreigners perceive and judge Japanese products, including its cuisine. This means that the popularity of Japanese cuisines is supported by the reputation of Japanese products and industry, making it pretty easy for foreigners to recognize and understand its cuisines. On the other hand, Indonesia has been a developing country, which unlike Japan, has strong but dynamic economic growth. This means that Indonesia does not own the privilege to have a global reputation like Japan does. Thus, implementing the same strategy as Japan does will leave no foreigner recognized and even interested in Indonesian cuisines. Besides that, having less economic power suggests that the influence of Indonesian as a global citizen is pretty low compared to the Japanese. Although the number of Japanese living abroad is almost 7 million lower compared to the Indonesian, their economic power is significantly higher than Indonesian citizens, allowing them to pursue the entrepreneurial route by offering their local speciality (including Japanese cuisines) abroad (Nippon.com, 2020).

Fortunately, there is a way for Indonesian cuisines to gain international recognition and attract foreigners to visit Indonesia to explore and try them: developing Indonesia culinary tourism. Since a long time ago, tourism development has always been the main focus for local entrepreneurs and the government to attract foreign travelers. Nowadays, Bali is not the only main travelers destination as other regions have been developing its tourism sites, such as Komodo Island, *Labuan Bajo*, Anambas Island, *Pulau Seribu*, and others. These uprising destinations have a similar approach strategy, which is to offer its visitors an experience to enjoy the beauty of the natural archipelago of Indonesia. In other words, the tourism industry that conducts business in those destinations are focusing on giving experience to its visitors, for both locals and foreigners.



Figure 1.9: AN INDONESIAN LIWETAN DINNER & FUND RAISER FOR SULAWESI AT FROM BALI TO BALA.

The proven benefits of utilizing experience as the main selling point can also be implemented for culinary tourism. Indeed, some local tourism businesses have been offering culinary experiences that allows travelers to try and experience local delicacy. However, it often acts as a minority excursion that only focuses on a limited number of cuisines. Moreover, the culinary experiences are only offered as an add-on of expensive tour packages, limiting visitors to try the authentic local culinary. Due to that cause, in order to develop Indonesian culinary tourism, local businesses are recommended to offer culinary experiences that focus on providing travelers to explore and try local cuisines. Moreover, these culinary experiences should prioritize the pleasure that travelers will perceive, which can be either from the unique flavor of the local cuisines, or from the bliss of the surrounding environment, or even both. For instance, local tourism businesses in East Java can offer a culinary experience that allows people to enjoy a morning picnic-type breakfast that overlooks Mount Bromo. Another example would be offering a culinary experience that allows people to enjoy glamorous full course night dinner under the moonlight on the beach of *Labuan Bajo*. Combining local cuisines with the surrounding environment provides travelers from local and overseas an exquisite, one and only experience they have never tried before. Moreover, focusing on culinary experiences means that local tourism businesses don't need to spend more budget on unrelated excursions, allowing them to offer various kinds of experiences depending on their target market.

Undeniably, these culinary experiences won't improve Indonesian culinary tourism if no public exposure is conducted. Due to that cause, it is recommended for local tourism businesses to collaborate with Key Opinion Leaders or KOLs that specialize in the travel industry. Specifically, local tourism businesses can offer KOLs a complimentary culinary experience in exchange of promoting the experiences on their

high-traffic social media accounts. These types of advertising will be more effective since nowadays, people are more attracted to products or services that other people used, especially from credible and popular KOLs. Local tourism businesses can collaborate with both local and foreign travel KOLs in order to gain exposure from around the world.

## CONCLUSION

Every Indonesian local cuisines have the power as cultural identity to boost Indonesian culinary tourism by developing culinary experiences that allows travelers to enjoy those local cuisines within the region's specialty tourism spot. Offering these unique culinary experiences could boost the number of people, especially foreigners to travel to Indonesia to try local cuisines. Looking at how big is the percentage of foreigners who travel to Japan for the sake of trying local culinaries, it is not impossible for Indonesia to have a similar outcome. Moreover, the collaboration with credible KOLs that specialize in the travel industry could boost more awareness and attract more foreigners to travel to Indonesia. In the long term, more people from around the world can recognize all different kinds of Indonesian cuisine as part of its cultural identity, which could help boost Indonesia's economic development and strengthen our position as a global country.

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