

**AN ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN CUISINE, FOOD PRODUCTION
AND CULTURE PROGRAM**



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5. Report

5.1 Proposed Executive Summary

Understanding the relationship between local cuisine, tourists and destinations has gained the serious attention of many tourism scholars over the last 16 years. Most studies have focused on the role of local cuisine and food choices to influence tourists' motivation to travel and extend their period of stay, as a unique selling point (i.e. competitive advantage) for a tourist destination, and place development. However, deeper understanding of 'how and why' local cuisine is integrated into the international tourist destination marketing has attracted less attention. This study investigates the way in which local cuisine is integrated into the Malaysian Government's destination marketing strategies for the country. It specifically focuses on the policy environment within the tourist industry administration, which has driven local cuisine utilisation as part of the experiences, roles and activities employed, strategic marketing initiatives developed, and the way Malaysian cuisine is represented by the Malaysian Government. Incorporating local cuisine into a multicultural identity has been a deliberate strategy that the Malaysian Government had adopted to market itself as an international tourist destination. However, to achieve this outcome, the Malaysian Government has had to develop a clear understanding of the role of local cuisine in the construction of its destination identity. The study is situated within the framework of the interpretive and social constructivist paradigm and employs a group of Australian students as a case study in order to understand the role of local cuisine in destination marketing. The findings reveal that the Malaysian Government, through relevant tourism policies, has substantially driven local cuisine utilisation as part of the tourism products and experiences offered in Malaysia. Continuous cooperation and support from relevant tourism and hospitality representatives, as well as strategic food marketing initiatives, were the essence of its success. Yet, the Malaysian Government has struggled to clearly identify a nuanced/all-encompassing concept of Malaysian cuisine. This becomes more complicated with the nature of Malaysia's multicultural background.

5.2 Enhanced Executive Summary

Tourist destinations are increasingly incorporating their local cuisines into their destination marketing campaigns, consumption of local cuisine provides tourists with an opportunity to learn about different cuisines, people, culture, and traditions. Tourists are attracted to opportunities to enjoy unique and high-quality food, participate in indigenous culture through food, and sample and purchase products that are not readily available in their own countries. Food-related festivals and events may be avenues for increasing tourists' knowledge of local foods. For instance, well-established food companies in Cornwall, England use such events to promote their products and Cornish heritage. Local cuisine can add to the sense of place that tourists search for.

However, delivering a clear culinary identity that links to a destination's brand image may be more difficult for multicultural nations. Canada's wide variety of immigrant and indigenous cultural traditions; climate, soils, and precipitation; and resulting local and regional products complicates the Canadian Tourism Commission's task of defining and selling Canada's culinary traditions. Malaysia, as a postcolonial country with its multicultural population of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples, faces similar challenges. To address them, the government has implemented various campaigns to further tourist understanding of and experience with Malaysian cuisine.

The study is situated within the framework of the interpretive and social constructivist paradigm and employs a group of Australian students as a case study in order to understand the role of local cuisine in destination marketing. Through these initiatives and their food-related events and activities, tourists have the opportunity to learn about and sample Malaysian dishes that reflect the diversity of local food production and Malaysia's multicultural identity. Such campaigns can importantly help Malaysia compete with Singapore and Indonesia, its neighbouring food tourism competitors.

The findings of this study found that strategic marketing initiatives have been developed by the Malaysian government to integrate cuisine into promoting the country as an international tourist destination. The cooking demonstrators at food events are appointed representatives who speak and share stories about Malaysian cuisine on behalf of the Malaysian government as well as the Malaysian nation. Such marketing strategies which involve highlighting Malaysian cuisine are particularly important as Malaysia is in direct competition for food tourists with Singapore and to a lesser extent, Indonesia, which both share cuisine elements with Malaysia. Including dishes such as chicken rice and nasi lemak in Malaysian food and tourism campaigns can cement the link of food with Malaysia's multicultural identity and further its appeal as a culinary tourism destination.

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