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The Relationship of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods and Their Intention to Visit San Fernando, Pampanga

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Abstract. This study examined the relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. As a recognized culinary destination, San Fernando is known for its exotic dishes, such as betute tugak and kamaru, which contribute to its gastronomic identity and cultural appeal. Despite the growing popularity of gastronomic tourism, limited research has explored how interest in exotic foods influences tourists' intention to visit the city. To address this gap, a quantitative-descriptive and correlational research design was employed. Data were collected from 30 local and international tourists who had experience with or interest in exotic foods using a researcher-made survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were utilized to analyze the data. The findings revealed that respondents exhibited a high level of interest in exotic foods, particularly in terms of perceived uniqueness, attractiveness, curiosity, willingness to try, and food sanitation. Likewise, respondents demonstrated a high level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga, primarily because of its distinctive culinary offerings and opportunities for authentic cultural experiences. The results further indicated a significant positive relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit the destination, suggesting that greater interest in exotic cuisine is associated with a stronger intention to travel to San Fernando. These findings underscore the importance of exotic foods in enhancing destination attractiveness and supporting gastronomic tourism. The study concludes that exotic cuisine serves as a valuable tourism asset that strengthens the city's culinary identity and encourages tourist visitation. Therefore, tourism stakeholders and local food establishments are encouraged to promote authentic exotic food experiences while maintaining high standards of food quality, sanitation, and cultural preservation.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism, Exotic Food Tourism, Kapampangan Cuisine, Tourist Interest, Travel Intention,

Introduction

Exotic foods have long been part of human culture and survival, serving not only as a source of nourishment but also as an expression of cultural identity and tradition. Since ancient times, food has played a central role in shaping societies and sustaining human development (Norenzayan, 2024). In recent years, interest in exotic foods has grown significantly, particularly in Asian countries where traditional culinary practices continue to evolve while preserving their cultural roots. Countries such as Vietnam and Thailand have gained international recognition for their distinctive cuisines, attracting tourists who seek authentic and unconventional food experiences. Tourists are often motivated to try local dishes as a way of immersing themselves in the culture of a destination, a trend further amplified by social media and digital travel content. While many travelers prefer familiar local delicacies, more adventurous tourists are willing to sample unusual dishes such as pork intestine congee (cháo lòng), fertilized duck eggs (trứng vịt lộn), snake meat, and steamed pig brain (Hansen et al., 2023). The popularity of food-based tourism is reflected in tourism statistics, with Thailand welcoming 35.6 million international visitors in 2024 and Vietnam receiving 17.5 million arrivals, making both countries among the leading tourism destinations in Southeast Asia (Sullivan, 2025).

According to Lopez (2024) in a time when travel to new places is becoming more and more popular and people are seeking unusual dining experiences, not only entices tourists' tastes but also provides an insight into a place's cultural background. As stated by Halaltrip (2016) as cited by Gonda (2025) , the Philippines has become one of the countries promoting exotic foods as it continues to expand in Asia. Aside from being known for its numerous natural attractions, it is quietly wonderful to try exotic cuisine that will definitely push you out of your comfort zone.

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Similarly, the Philippines has increasingly promoted its unique culinary offerings as part of its tourism development strategy. According to Lopez (2024), the growing demand for distinctive travel experiences has encouraged tourists to explore destinations through their food traditions. In addition to providing memorable dining experiences, local cuisines offer valuable insights into a destination's history, culture, and way of life. As noted by HalalTrip (2016), cited in Gonda (2025), the Philippines has emerged as one of the Asian countries actively promoting exotic cuisine. Beyond its natural attractions, the country offers a variety of unconventional dishes that challenge tourists to step outside their culinary comfort zones and experience authentic local traditions.

Among Philippine provinces, Pampanga stands out for its rich culinary heritage and diverse food traditions. Widely recognized as the "Culinary Capital of the Philippines," the province earned this distinction through generations of skilled cooks whose expertise originated during the Spanish colonial period (Gregana & Ylagan, 2022). This culinary knowledge has been passed down through generations, contributing to the development of numerous Kapampangan dishes that reflect the province's cultural identity. According to Garcia (2023), the use of animals in food preparation remains deeply embedded in Pampanga's cultural and economic traditions. Among the most notable examples are betute tugak (stuffed frog) and camaru (mole crickets), both of which occupy a significant place in the region's culinary landscape.

The utilization of survival food was determined by the availability of food during the dry or wet seasons, as well as the insect life cycle. During rainy seasons, for example, Kamaru (crickets) prospered as well as farm frogs. The Kapampangans, who are known for their culinary expertise, later discovered the edible properties of the farm frog. As a result, cuisines based on indigenous ingredients were evolved (Morales, 2023). The relative affordability of frogs, especially in comparison to more costly protein sources such as chicken, makes them a significant food resource for numerous families. This study explores the utilization, preparation methods, and economic implications of these species in local food practices.

As explained by Kumari (2024) Exotic food is something that a person finds strange and unfamiliar. Exotic food can be unusual types of meats, fruits, vegetables or spices or it can also be the way that the food is prepared. In different socio-economic environments, exotic food is providing differentiated services to meet people's diverse food preferences and needs (Armington, 1969 cited by Tian et al., 2022). According to Maraña (2024) Factors such as food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specialist food-producing regions serve as motivating factors for food travel. However, this suggests that unique food experiences are crucial for attracting and satisfying food tourists. The change in human demand, the interest in food and beverages and the increase in expectations from food and beverage businesses also led to the emergence of culinary trends (Erdem & Akyürek, 2017 cited by Turker et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Pampanga's exotic dishes offer visitors unique gastronomic experiences that challenge conventional perceptions of food. According to the Philippine Travel Guide (2024), camaru is valued for its distinctive flavor and texture, providing diners with an unexpected yet memorable culinary experience. Through the combination of traditional cooking methods and unconventional ingredients, Pampanga has developed a culinary landscape that celebrates both cultural heritage and innovation. This fusion of tradition and creativity demonstrates the province's commitment to preserving its culinary identity while adapting to evolving tourism trends.

Historically, the consumption of indigenous ingredients such as frogs and crickets was influenced by seasonal food availability and agricultural conditions. During the rainy season, farm frogs and crickets became abundant sources of food, prompting local communities to incorporate them into their diets. Over time, Kapampangans refined these ingredients into distinctive dishes that eventually became part of the province's culinary heritage (Morales, 2023). In addition to their cultural significance, these food sources remain economically important because they are often more affordable than conventional protein options such as chicken. As a result, exotic foods continue to play a vital role in both local food practices and regional tourism.

Despite the fact that studies on culinary experiences and food tourism have expanded throughout time, significant gaps remain. Exotic cuisine is frequently ignored as a particular issue that can affect travelers' decisions when discussing food tourism in general. As a result, little is known about how strange or foreign cuisine influences travelers' desire to visit a place and their actual travel decisions. Furthermore, only a small amount of quantitative research has specifically looked at the connection between tourists' desire to travel and their interest with foreign cuisine.

There is still a lack of local-level quantitative research about the exotic foods in Pampanga. In terms of perceived uniqueness, attractiveness, curiosity, cultural value, and willingness to try, little research has examined how the Kapampangan exotic cuisine affects tourists' motivation to travel and their satisfaction. Aside from that, the current public literature does not explain issues about food sanitation, which have an impact on tourists' willingness to try it. Because of this, it is still unclear how the tourists' interest and intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga, are influenced by this type of Kapampangan cuisine.

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This study aims to analyze the relationship between the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods and their level of intention to visit Pampanga. It also seeks to determine the types of exotic foods in Pampanga that attract the most tourist interest and determine the factors that influence tourists' openness to try exotic dishes.

The findings of this study are expected to make several significant contributions. Firstly, it will equip local tourism officials and entrepreneurs with essential knowledge regarding how exotic cuisine influences tourist actions and contentment. Grasping this connection can assist them developing more impactful marketing approaches and dining experiences that resonate with
both local and global travelers.

Secondly, this research will aid in the preservation and promotion of Kapampangan culture by emphasizing the significance of unique dishes in defining the region's culinary identity. By increasing awareness of the cultural and historical origins of these foods, the study could inspire both residents and visitors to value their heritage.

Ultimately, this research will act as a valuable resource for future researchers in tourism, hospitality, and gastronomy. It has the potential to motivate further studies on the ways in which food-related experiences shape destination perception, cultural sustainability, and the growth of tourism.

Research Questions

The general aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between the level of tourists' interest and their level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. Specifically, the research will seek answers to the following questions:

1. How may the demographic profile of the respondents be described in terms of:
   1.1 Age;
   1.2 Sex;
   1.3 Place of residence; and
   1.4 Frequency of travel?
2. How may the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods in San Fernando, Pampanga be described in terms of;
   2.1 Perceived uniqueness;
   2.2 Attractiveness;
   2.3 Curiosity;
   2.4 Willingness to experience; and
   2.5 Food Sanitation?
3. How may the level of tourists' intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga be described in terms of:
   3.1 Travel motivation; and
   3.2 Satisfaction?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods and their level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study examined the relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. Specifically, it investigated how factors such as curiosity, perceived uniqueness, attractiveness, cultural value, willingness to try, and perceptions of safety and hygiene regarding unusual dishes influenced tourists' intention to visit the destination. The study aimed to determine whether these food-related interests encouraged travel to San Fernando, a city recognized for its unique culinary offerings and rich gastronomic heritage. Data was collected during the designated data-gathering period through the administration of survey questionnaires. The respondents consisted of local tourists aged 18 years and above who had plans to visit or expressed interest in visiting San Fernando because of its food attractions. Participants came from diverse backgrounds and possessed varying levels of familiarity with Filipino and exotic cuisines. Individuals, who were merely passing through the city, such as commuters or those visiting for non-leisure purposes, were excluded from study.

Literature Review

Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods

In today's globalized society, where tourism grows quickly, people prefer to explore different cultures through local foods. Using food, it can better appreciate the history, character, and traditions of a specific community. The local community's rich cultural traditions are demonstrated in Sabahan foods like Hinava, Pinasakan, Tuhau, and Nuba Laya. Nonetheless, while ethnic foods hold promises for increasing tourism, there

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is little knowledge about what influences tourists' decision to try them. Cognitive factors include what tourists know, believe, and feel about ethnic foods, including their authenticity, safety, and special characteristics. While hedonic effects relate to the enjoyment and satisfaction of food, emotional factors include the feelings of nostalgia, happiness, and cultural links that come with eating. Despite this, there is still limited knowledge of how these three variables impact the purchase of ethnic foods among tourists, especially in Sabah. Likewise, having positive emotions during ethnic food experiences may encourage tourists to discuss them online, impacting how other tourists decide to travel (Abdullah et al, 2023). According to Dharanikumar (2023) Exotic fruits which are unfamiliar and non-native fruits are gaining popularity among people. In 2023, India's total fruit production was estimated to be around 107 million metric tons. The major fruits grown in India include Mangoes, Grapes, Apples, Apricots, Oranges, Bananas, Avocados, Guava, Lychee, Papaya, Chico, and Watermelons. Consumer preferences for exotic fruits have witnessed a remarkable shift, reflecting a growing craving for diverse culinary experiences and healthier lifestyles. Also, Exotic foods are known to be disgusting. The first thing that comes to everybody's mind is that Exotic Foods are commonly insects, bugs, snakes, frogs, crocodiles, worms, animal feces and many more. What researchers do not know is that exotic foods are also unusual combinations of food. Researchers have no idea how delicious they might be but may be oddly looking. Exotic foods are also foods that are thought of as absolutely weird; examples are Pinakbet Burger, Sili Ice Cream, Bulalo Ice Cream and many more. The researchers have researched and studied books, articles, journals and even theses dissertations they have found. Exotic foods can be defined as those that are outside the norm of a particular culture or region's culinary traditions. They often involve unusual ingredients, cooking methods, or presentation styles that differentiate them from more familiar dishes. The cultural significance of exotic foods lies in their ability to evoke a sense of adventure, curiosity, and connection to different cultures.Trying exotic foods can be a rewarding experience, offering a glimpse into the culinary traditions and cultural practices of different communities. It can also be a great way to challenge one's palate and broaden one's culinary horizons (Lee, 2025).

Perceived uniqueness

According to Ariyasriwatana, (2022) authenticity is the important quality that diners look for when having "exotic" food. One would not spend mental energy contemplating whether one's familiar food is authentic. It is either authentic or forgivably inauthentic—and one would instantly know, but would not really care. Researchers generally take familiar food's authenticity for granted. With accumulating experience, the "exotic" food can become more familiar (less exotic), while the diner's ability to judge authenticity is increasing. Diners analyze and discuss authenticity. This study aims to investigate how Yelpers discuss food authenticity and exoticism, qualities that signify good taste in food, as expressions of deliciousness. When consumers look for novel and exciting food products, perceived uniqueness and naturalness have been suggested to be the most important factors in successfully marketing new food products. First, the consumer perception of seaweed as a unique type of food could be vital for its commercial success as a new food product in Europe. Second, perceived naturalness is an especially relevant factor, as it integrates the attributes of environmental friendliness and healthiness. Hence, this study incorporates perceived uniqueness and perceived naturalness as a relevant extension of the VAB framework to study seaweed consumption (Govaerts et al., 2023).

Attractiveness

As mentioned by Chamorro and Ladio, (2020) the study of native and exotic edible plant use in rural and indigenous communities offers an opportunity to appreciate how humans have experimented with the diversity of their plant surroundings in search of wellbeing. As established by Etkin and Ross, plant studies in these communities should be approached with understanding of the integral nature of food and health concepts. In their search for this functionality, humans have intentionally selected dual-purpose resources (edible-medicinal) and have also tended towards diversification of food types and new forms of consumption. Consequently, researchers are interested in showing the multidimensionality and multifunctionality of the plants with edible fleshy fruits (PEFF), considering all their plant parts in an integral way. This form of tourism involves travelers seeking unique and authentic food and beverage experiences that reflect the culture and history of a destination. Food is no longer just an essential aspect of survival during travel; it has become a key motivator for travel itself (Mehta et al., 2024). As stated by Mariutti et al., (2021) insect consumption is one of the most studied and promoted alternatives to support the increasing protein demand caused by the world population growth. Insects have attracted much attention as a novel food source because of their environmental and nutritional advantages (Bisconsin et al., 2022). As a matter of fact, alternative protein sources like insects or cultured meat might trigger neophobic responses among segments of consumers, whereas planted-based proteins are more likely to be accepted (Onwezen et al., 2021).

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Curiosity

According to Lowenstein, (1994) as cited by Stone et al (2022) curiosity is an enticing feeling, characterised by awareness of a knowledge gap which can elicit a need to seek information in order to close that gap. Hence, curiosity is well positioned to motivate the first – novel – experience with insect foods. Decisions to engage in novel behaviours are thought to be driven by the intrinsic reward associated with learning new information about the environment. and can kickstart a positive feedback loop of trying new things (Maruyama, 2019 as cited by Stone et al., 2022). Entomophagy the consumption of insects is often rejected by Western society despite its benefits over traditional animal-based proteins. While several factors have been identified as potential predictors of people's willingness to try insect foods, this study introduced an under-explored factor: curiosity, which is a powerful motivator of behaviour that can overcome negative emotions and motivate us to seek new experiences. In two experiments (Ns = 240 and 248), participants (all UK residents, 99.6% British citizens) rated a number of food dishes, half of which contained insects, on a number of factors including curiosity and willingness to try the dish. Across both studies, curiosity predicted willingness to try both insect and non-insect foods above and beyond other factors. Furthermore, researchers unexpectedly (but consistently) observed a "curiosity-boosting effect" in which curiosity positively interacted with other predictors, increasing their effect on willingness to try insect foods, but not familiar foods. These findings suggest that curiosity promotes the willingness to try insect food in two different manners: A direct effect (above and beyond other factors) and a boosting effect. As stated by Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2019) as cited by Piramanayagam et al (2020) the justification for exploring the key components contributing to tourists' memories of local food experiences was that food functions as a trigger for destination choices, can help tourists to shape their overall impression of a destination. In addition, food-related memories can encourage tourists' emotional attachment to a destination, enhancing their level of involvement with it (Sthapit et al., 2017 as cited by Piramanayagam et al., 2020) and influencing their revisit intentions (Sthapit, 2019 as cited by Piramanayagam et al., 2020).

Willingness to experience

From the point of view of Schifferstein, (2006) as cited by Kudrowitz (2020) food products are a unique subset of consumer products in that sensory experiences during interaction with them can involve all of the senses: vision, touch, audition, smell, and taste. People smell aromas just before food enters their mouths; when the food is in the oral cavity, they perceive taste and food flavors that reach the olfactory epithelium in the nasal cavity via the retronasal pathway at the back of the mouth. People also feel the rough, smooth, sticky, or slippery surface of the product on their tongues and they feel the thickness, hardness, elasticity, and stiffness of the product mass in their mouths when they masticate. In addition, they hear the crunching, crackling, crispy sounds while they bite, and possibly the soft smacking and slurping sounds while they chew and swallow. In some cases, you might even perceive the movement of food in your mouth. The perception of sensory information is the starting point for how a food product is experienced: whether it is pleasing or not, the cognitive associations and meanings it evokes, the actions it triggers, and the emotional responses that it may elicit. Originz, (2024) defined that the interest in exotic foods in Saudi Arabia is largely driven by shifting consumer preferences, increased urbanisation, and growing exposure to international cuisines. Younger Saudis, influenced by global trends and their own travels, bring a diverse range of culinary experiences back home. Exotic foods in Saudi Arabia are gaining traction among both locals and expatriates eager to try something different from the traditional fare. Based on Kumari, (2024) India is a country known for tradition, values and customs, but in the present scenario due to western influence our youths are westernized to the extent that majority of the youths are opting exotic food instead of Indian traditional foods. This article explores the impact of exotic food on Indian youth. Exotic food is something that a person finds strange and unfamiliar. Exotic food can be unusual types of meats, fruits, vegetables or spices or it can also be the way that the food is prepared. According to Collins dictionary the exotic food is defined as Something that is exotic is unusual and interesting, usually because it comes from or is related to a distant country.

Food Sanitation

According to Sharma, (2025) Food hygiene is a critical component of food safety and public health, aiming to minimize contamination and prevent foodborne illnesses. Poor food hygiene practices can lead to severe health risks, including diseases caused by harmful bacteria, viruses, and parasites. In a context of fast raise of the world population, it is envisaged that by 2050 the world population reaches about 10 billion. In this scenario, the demand for food is expected to increase by approximately 50% (Lu et al., 2024 cited by Guiné, 2024). For this reason, food security is at risk and all over efforts are being made to look for more sustainable and efficient ways to feed humans Guiné et al., (2020). As stated by Guine, (2024) At a global level we face serious problems of food and feed insecurity, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, wasteful

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disposal of food and resources, as well as unsustainable food production practices. Also, The factors that may determine the eating behaviors of individuals can be of very differentiated natures, and have variable degrees of influence on people's food choices, this work intended to test six different complementing scales for eating motivations, namely: health, emotions, price and availability, society and culture, environment and politics, and marketing and commercials. The acceptance and perception of food risk derived from insect consumption vary depending on factors impacting insect consumption acceptability, including neophobic tendencies, gender differences, familiarity, and culinary perceptions. The aim of this work was to evaluate the perception and acceptance of edible insects by exploring these factors.

Tourist Intention to Visit Places

As explained by Aziz et al (2023) Food is a significant source of attraction for tourists and they visit new destinations to satisfy their need for novel and exotic ethnic food. Ethnic food influences tourists behavior and destination choice, how tourists seek for authentic and culturally rich food experiences. People visit ethnic cuisine to satisfy their need for novel and exotic food with authentic taste. Love for food has provided destination marketers a way to attract tourists by offering specialised ethnic food at food festivals and cultural events. Tourists' culinary experiences play a significant role in shaping their travel decisions, as food can serve as a primary motivation for visiting a destination. In a study conducted in Popayán, Colombia, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, researchers found that the importance of the culinary experience influenced tourists' satisfaction and mediated the effect of their culinary motivations on the overall visit. Specifically, tourists' attitudes toward local food, including their interest in tasting unique and authentic dishes, were shown to impact their engagement with the destination's gastronomy (Moreira et al, 2024). This indicates that exotic or novel foods are not only sought for their taste and cultural value but also function as a pull factor, encouraging tourists to choose a destination. The cultural nuances of local food and its significant impact on the local community make it an attractive and popular choice among tourists. The consumption of local food cuisines embodies the essence of local culture and traditions, offering a diverse array of choices in terms of environment, knowledge, perceived value, authenticity, and quality (Wan et al., 2025). Gregana and Ylanna (2023) defined that it is necessary to understand how tourist satisfaction relates to the destination's gastronomy. According to study, the tourism industry's entire performance depends on client pleasure. Almost all researchers agree that satisfied tourists are more loyal and likely to return. Despite increased interest, little research has been done on gastronomy's function in tourism. Most studies focus on culinary or food tourism, not general gastronomy. More research is needed to understand the importance of authentic and regional cuisines in tourism. Gastronomic tourism is growing, including in the Philippines. It is the best approach for a tourist to learn about and distinguish a country's culture. Gastronomic destinations go beyond food. It reflects cultures, heritages, customs, and belonging. This strategy promotes cultural awareness by bringing together individuals and traditions. Gastronomic tourism is equally crucial for protecting cultural heritage and creating tourism opportunities. Food tourism, culinary tourism, and culinary tourism are sometimes used interchangeably, but they encourage different cultural links. Pampanga in Central Luzon is referred to as the Culinary Capital of the Philippines because the province is known for excellent cooks whom the Spaniards trained during the colonial era in the province. These great cooks pass on their culinary expertise from generation to generation, making the province home to several Filipino cuisines that can be an entry point to knowing their culture and food practices. In order to compete with existing competitors, the province must allow tourists to explore the authenticity of the local cuisines through promoting Gastronomic Tourism that highlights the culture of the local people that made its cuisine what it is today (Giray et al., 2021).

Travel motivation

According to O'Reilly (2020) Motivation is the heart of human cognition and action. Motivation in the tourism literature is defined as "a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or a group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision" (Dann, 1981, p. 205 as cited by Khalilzadeh, 2024). As stated by Dhungana (2024) motivation has been defined as practices required in starting, directing, and maintaining physical and psychological activities. In line with this, Cooper and Hall state that tourism is influenced by a variety of factors that govern its relative distribution. "Push and pull factors" are the two highly explored dimensions in the earlier studies of travel motivations. According to Crompton (1979) as cited by Pereira (2023) Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioral intention to visit a destination is beneficial for tourism planning and marketing, Crompton identified nine dimensions of travel motivation, that is, self-evaluation and exploration, relaxation, feeling of prestige, doing inconceivable things, enhancement of relationship, social interaction, cultural reasons, and experience loyalty.

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Satisfaction

The tourism sector plays a pivotal role in the global economy and contributes significantly to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2023, the Tourism and travel sector contributed 9,1% to the global GDP or an increase of 23,2% from 2022 (WTTC). Apart from that, international tourism income has also increased, reaching USD 1.4 trillion in 2023 (UNWTO, 2024). Based on Ratih (2024), the higher the number of tourists visits is related to economic distributions, whether due to encouragement both of domestic and international travel. They spend money on various tourist needs such as accommodation, fbs, transportation and other tourist activities. Tourism experience has a significant impact on satisfaction and revisit intention (S. Lee et al., 2020). Intention to revisit is also a customer's intention to continue returning to a place they have visited and is an indication of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Yoo et al., 2020). As mentioned by Acharya (2023) satisfaction is measured either in the form of attribute satisfaction or overall satisfaction. Attribute satisfaction assesses the satisfaction level of the visitor on various attributes of the destination whereas overall satisfaction measures the visitors' level of satisfaction holistically.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative-descriptive and correlational research design to investigate and examine the relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. The quantitative approach focused on measuring the relationship between these variables through the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data. Specifically, the correlational design was employed to determine the extent to which tourists' interest in exotic foods was associated with their intention to visit San Fernando. The study involved the collection and analysis of numerical data obtained through structured survey questionnaires administered to a representative sample of respondents. These surveys served as the primary instrument for measuring the correlation between tourists' expressed interest in exotic foods and their stated intention to visit the destination.

Sampling Design

The population of interest in this study consisted of travelers in San Fernando, Pampanga, who had experienced or expressed interest in exotic foods. Purposive sampling was employed to select the respondents based on specific inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The researchers utilized the Central Limit Theorem as a basis for selecting a sample size of 30 respondents, which facilitated the generalization of findings while conserving time and resources. Respondents were selected according to the following criteria: they were local or international tourists aged 18 years and above, were either first-time or repeat visitors, had experience with or interest in trying exotic foods in San Fernando, Pampanga, and were willing to participate and provide honest responses. According to Bujang et al. (2024), a minimum sample size of 30 respondents is sufficient for assessing the reliability of a questionnaire in a pilot study, providing researchers with a practical guideline for determining sample size requirements. The inclusion criteria required respondents to be local or international tourists who were not permanent residents of San Fernando, Pampanga. Participants were either first-time or repeat visitors, were at least 18 years old, and possessed familiarity with or interest in exotic foods through previous encounters with exotic dishes or a willingness to try them. In addition, respondents had to voluntarily agree to participate in the study. Conversely, individuals below 18 years of age were excluded from the study. Respondents who had no interest in or exposure to exotic foods, meaning they neither had prior experience with exotic dishes nor any intention of trying them, were also excluded from participation.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was specifically designed to measure two key variables: tourists' level of interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. It consisted of close-ended questions answered using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was divided into three sections. The first section gathered the respondents' demographic information. The second section assessed their level of interest in exotic foods, with responses ranging from 1 (Not Interested) to 5 (Highly Interested). The third section measured their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga, using a scale ranging from 1 (Not Intended) to 5 (Highly Intended). Prior to its administration, the research instrument was validated by experts in their respective fields to ensure its content validity and appropriateness for the study. A survey questionnaire was employed because it provided a practical and systematic means of collecting data from the respondents. This method facilitated the organization and comparison of responses, allowing the researchers to identify patterns in tourists' interests and travel intentions. Furthermore, the structure of the questionnaire enabled efficient data processing using

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the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), where statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient were applied. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79. According to commonly accepted standards, this value indicated acceptable internal consistency, suggesting that the questionnaire items were sufficiently reliable for measuring the constructs under investigation.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: How may the demographic profile of the respondents be described in terms of Age, Sex, Place of residence and Frequency of travel?

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-30	4	13.3%
31-50	16	53.3%
51-60	2	6.7%
61-80	8	26.7%
Total	**30**	**100%**

Table 1 shows the frequency and dissemination of the respondents in terms of age. Mostly of the respondents (f = 16, 53.3%) are within the age bracket of "31-50", which is the highest percentage, indicating that middle aged travelers exhibit the strongest interest in trying exotic food experiences. This demographic is also the most likely to express a high intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga suggesting that targeted marketing strategies should focus on engaging this age group through cultural and culinary food. While the lowest percentage of respondents is at the age bracket of "51-60" and "18-30". The results show that the majority of the respondents are within the age 31-50. Based on the statement of Mohammed et al. (2024), middle-aged adult tourists aged 30 to 50 are courageous and seasoned explorers. Between younger and senior travelers, they are more influential on food tourism as they are more willing to spend on food experience and actively seek local cuisine (Campón-Cerro et al., 2022). Aside from that, as stated by Barzallo et al. (2025), Understanding the behavior, willingness to pay, expectations, and experiences of culinary tourism demand is a fundamental input for supporting scientifically based tourism planning and management in various destinations. The study's findings, which show that the majority of respondents are aged 31-50, are strongly supported by existing literature. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the travel preferences difference between middle-aged, younger and senior travelers suggesting that these factors had negligible influence on food tourism. Therefore, these results highlight the dominance of the middle-aged demographic in culinary tourism whose engagement is driven more by personal experience.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	16	53.33%
Male	14	46.67%
Total	**30**	**100%**

Table 2 shows the frequency of the respondents in terms of gender. The demographic analysis reveals the gender distribution within the sample population, indicating that females constitute 53.33% (16 individuals) while males account for 46.67% (14 individuals) of the total participants. According to Matalas et al. (2023) role of gender in key behaviors concerning tourists' eating habits, compared to men, women were more motivated to taste local food, especially with respect to obtaining cultural experience and excitement, promoting interpersonal relations, such as a positive attitude and motivation to consume foods produced locally in the destination.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Place of Residence

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Within Pampanga	24	80.00%
Outside Pampanga	6	20.00%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

It shows a demographic profile of tourists based on their place of residence, Within Pampanga with 24 tourists (80% of the total) and Outside Pampanga with 6 tourists (20% of the total) with a total of 30 tourists.

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This breakdown indicates that most tourists (80%) are from within Pampanga while (20%) are from outside Pampanga. Results show that most of the tourists who are intended to visit San Fernando are residents within Pampanga. The place of residence has a significant role in influencing tourists' interest and intention to travel. With every individual's level of exposure to different cuisines, it helps to shape their perceptions and willingness to explore new food destinations. Pu et al. (2024) conducted a study on how food experiences affect travel intentions to the destinations where the cuisine originates. It highlighted that tourists from different places of residence develop attitudes toward food and travel. Moreover, the study highlighted that exposure to different cultures shapes tourists' preferences by showing strong interest in local food and cuisine when visiting a destination. The study aims to create and evaluate a model that would comprehend the relationship between food experience and travel intention to the destination of origin of food cuisine. This result aligns with findings, which emphasized that food experience implies that tourists from different places of residence develop interest in certain cuisines. Therefore, the study supports that food-related interests may develop a strong attraction for tourists from different residential backgrounds.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Frequency of Travel

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Once	3	10.00%
Twice	5	16.67%
More than Three Times	22	73.33%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

The frequency analysis reveals the travel patterns among the sample population: once, 3 respondents with (10.00% of total) Twice, 5 respondents with (16.67% of total) More than three times, 22 respondents with (73.33% of total). The total number of responses collected was 30. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents have visited San Fernando, Pampanga, more than three times, suggesting a high level of interest or familiarity with the destination. The result shows that the respondents' frequency of travel influences their interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. According to the Zaeimoedin et al. (2022) study, frequent travelers are more likely to return to destinations after having food-related experiences that are influenced by satisfaction with food uniqueness, quality, and flavor, which has a significant impact on repeat visiting behavior. Furthermore, a study published in the Journal of Destination Management (2020) revealed that influencing tourists' impressions resulted in a deeper attachment to the frequency of visits to locations, as well as a greater influence from overall eating experiences. These results align with study as the findings suggest that tourists who travel more frequently are more likely to seek experiences which increase their intention to visit a destination.

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Residency

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Alasas	15	50.00%
Del Pilar	15	50.00%
Total	**30**	**100%**

This shows the distribution and frequency of the respondents in terms of residency. The municipality of San Fernando, Pampanga consists of 35 barangays. Barangay Alasas and Del Pilar in San Fernando, Pampanga are most recognized as important hubs for traditional Kapampangan cuisine, where dishes involving exotic animals such as frogs (betute tugak) and crickets (camaru) are not only popular but also integral to the region's identity. The analysis of tourist interest distribution reveals a balanced preference between two key destinations, with Barangay Alasas and Del Pilar each accounting for 50.00% of the total responses (15 individuals per category).

Research Question 2: How may the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods in San Fernando, Pampanga be described in terms of Perceived uniqueness, Attractiveness, Curiosity, Willingness to experience and Food Sanitation?

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Table 6. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods in Terms of Perceived Uniqueness

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I believe that Pampanga's Exotic foods are distinct from those found from other destinations.	4.53	0.77	Highly Interested
2.	I notice that the ingredients used in Pampanga's Exotic Food represent local uniqueness.	4.53	0.77	Highly Interested
3.	The traditional methods used in preparing exotic food in San Fernando, Pampanga increased my interest in trying them.	4.60	0.85	Highly Interested
4.	I believe Exotic Foods offer flavors that are rarely experienced elsewhere.	4.70	0.70	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.59**	**0.06**	**Highly Interested**

For Perceived Uniqueness (Table 9), the overall (mean = 4.60) (standard deviation = 0.61), with individual item scores ranging from 4.53 to 4.70, all interpreted as "Highly Interested." This indicates that respondents show strong interest in Pampanga's cuisine as distinct from other places. They are highly interested in their unique local ingredients, traditional preparation methods, and flavors that offer experiences not found elsewhere. The results indicate that respondents show a high level of interest in exotic foods due to its perceived uniqueness. A finding of Susiang (2025), uniqueness is often associated with traditional ingredients, preparations methods and presenting local culture which enhance the uniqueness of the cuisine. Similarly, according to Cengiz (2023) tourists who seek unique taste and experiences are more likely to develop a strong intention to explore food that is different from what they commonly experience; it states that the desire for uniqueness increases tourists' involvement and interest in local cuisine. Therefore, these findings indicate that the perceived uniqueness of exotic foods significantly contributes to tourists' interest in exploring different experiences. The findings of the present studies emphasize the significant role of perceived uniqueness as a key factor that influences tourists' interest in exotic foods and encourage them to explore diverse culinary experiences.

Table 7. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods in Terms of Attractiveness

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I find Pampanga's Exotic foods are visually appealing.	4.60	0.77	Highly Interested
2.	Restaurants offering exotic foods in San Fernando, Pampanga are attractive to me.	4.53	0.77	Highly Interested
3.	The presentation of exotic foods encourages me to try them.	4.66	0.66	Highly Interested
4.	I consider Exotic Foods in San Fernando; Pampanga are way more attractive than commonly served local dishes.	4.50	0.82	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.57**	**0.06**	**Highly Interested**

Regarding Attractiveness (Table 10), the domain recorded a (mean = 4.57), (standard deviation = 0.067), with scores ranging from 4.50 to 4.66, interpreted as "Highly Interested." The results suggest that respondents are highly interested in the food's visual appeal, its availability in local restaurants in San Fernando, Pampanga, and its inviting presentation. They also show strong interest in it compared to other local food options. The findings of the present study, which indicate that respondents show a high level of interest in exotic foods in terms of attractiveness, are often associated with the visual presentation, sensory appeal, and overall dining experience, which significantly influence tourists' interest and engagement. Adawiyah (2025), published a study in Indonesian Journal of Tourism, it indicates that food attractiveness including presentation, visual appearance and sensory appeal has an effect on tourists' overall food-related experience. Food aesthetic experience acts as a crucial role influencing tourists' behavioral interests indicating that attractive food presentation which can motivate tourists to engage more with local cuisine (Zhu et al., 2024). The findings align with the results of the present study confirming that attractiveness increases tourists' interest and encourages them to explore more culinary experiences in destinations such as San Fernando, Pampanga.

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Table 8. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods in Terms of Curiosity

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Hearing about exotic food increases my intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga.	4.56	0.97	Highly Interested
2.	I feel interested in discovering unfamiliar food experiences.	4.50	0.82	Highly Interested
3.	Exotic Foods increased my interest in exploring local cuisine.	4.56	0.85	Highly Interested
4.	Media or mouth-of-mouth about San Fernando, Pampanga's Exotic Foods increases my curiosity.	4.46	0.89	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.52**	**0.06**	**Highly Interested**

For the Curiosity domain (Table 11), the (mean = 4.56), (standard deviation = 0.06), with scores between 4.50 and 4.56, interpreted as "Highly Interested." This shows that respondents are highly interested in learning more about the cuisine, trying unfamiliar dishes, and exploring both traditional and modern food preparations. The results suggest that curiosity plays a significant role in influencing tourists' willingness to engage in culinary exploration. Singh et al., (2023) conducted a study of evaluating tourist behavior toward traditional food consumption. The study found that curiosity influences tourists' interest to try new and unfamiliar culinary experiences. The study aims to explore the food choice behavior of tourists concerning traditional food. The findings have practical implications for the gastronomic tourism industry, suggesting a focus on emotional impact, food quality and presentation towards consumers who are open to new experiences and ready to experiment. Khan et al, (2025) study emphasizes that individuals who actively seek and enjoy unfamiliar foods leads to a greater engagement with local cuisine and cultural experience. In addition, curiosity and interest are closely linked to tourists' preferences for exotic foods. This finding indicates that curiosity toward exotic foods contributes to tourists' interest in exploring new food related experiences, supporting the result of the present study that respondents are highly interested in trying unfamiliar food due to their curiosity.

Table 9. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods in Terms of Willingness to Experience

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I am willing to try exotic foods at least once.	4.60	0.77	Highly Interested
2.	I am open to trying interesting unfamiliar food experiences.	4.53	0.77	Highly Interested
3.	I would like to share exotic food experiences with others.	4.53	0.77	Highly Interested
4.	would like to share exotic food experiences with others.	4.56	0.67	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.55**	**0.05**	**Highly Interested**

In terms of Willingness to Experience (Table 12), the domain (mean = 4.55), (standard deviation = 0.06), with values ranging from 4.53 to 4.56, also interpreted as "Highly Interested." This reflects a strong interest in tasting exotic dishes, engaging in new culinary experiences, and sharing these experiences with others. This is evident from the results, as it is shown that respondents have a high willingness to try exotic foods, which is a key factor in their interest in culinary exploration. According to Kim et al. (2020), it is more likely for tourists who are ready to try local cuisine to have positive perceptions of a destination and participate in meaningful cultural experiences. Moreover, Bessière et al. (2021) emphasized that willingness to try new foods improves the overall tourist experience, as it is shown that tourists who actively participate in trying local cuisine tend to have more satisfying tourist experiences. Additionally, Stylidis et al. (2022) highlighted that willingness to try new foods is associated with cultural immersion, as it is more likely for tourists who try new foods to have a sense of connection to the culture of a specific destination. As such, these findings suggest that tourists' willingness to experience exotic foods is a significant factor that contributes to their interest in engaging with local foods, as supported by the findings of the current study regarding tourists' high willingness to try new and unfamiliar foods.

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Table 10. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods in Terms of Food Sanitation

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I believe that San Fernando, Pampanga's exotic food is prepared in a safe and hygienic manner.	4.43	0.89	Highly Interested
2.	The restaurant's cleanliness of preparation in San Fernando, Pampanga affects my decision to try exotic foods.	4.50	0.73	Highly Interested
3.	Proper hygiene practices increase my interest in trying exotic foods.	4.63	0.71	Highly Interested
4.	I feel confident trying exotic foods in San Fernando, Pampanga because of the safety and hygiene standards enforced by local authorities.	4.60	0.77	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.54**	**0.08**	**Highly Interested**

Meanwhile, the Food Sanitation domain (Table 13) obtained a (mean = 4.55), (standard deviation = 0.24655584), with scores ranging from 4.50 to 4.59, interpreted as "Highly Interested." This indicates that respondents are highly interested in and confident about food safety and hygiene practices, with only slight variations in their responses. The results showed that respondents consider food sanitation as a vital factor in their interest in consuming exotic foods. Food safety and hygiene are significant determinants in tourists' willingness to consume unfamiliar foods, as tourists' concerns over food sanitation can affect their perceptions of food quality. This proposition is corroborated by Soon et al. (2020), who showed that tourists' willingness towards unfamiliar foods is significantly influenced by their concern over food safety and hygiene. In a related vein, Jeaheng et al. (2022) showed that proper handling of foods would help build tourists' confidence towards consuming local foods, hence boosting consumption of exotic foods. This shows that food sanitation significantly affects tourists' interest in exotic foods, which in turn corroborates this present study's finding that respondents are more inclined to participate in culinary activities as long as proper hygiene and safety standards are met.

Table 11. Level of Tourists' Interest in Exotic Foods Total Domain

Perceived Uniqueness	4.59	0.61	Highly Interested
Attractiveness	4.57	0.06	Highly Interested
Curiosity	4.52	0.06	Highly Interested
Willingness to Experience	4.55	0.05	Highly Interested
Food Sanitation	4.54	0.08	Highly Interested
Total Domain	**4.55**	**0.24**	**Highly Interested**

The Total Domain recorded an average of mean = 4.57, standard deviation = 0.38, interpreted as "High Interest." These findings indicate that tourists show a strong interest in experiencing exotic and local foods, highlighting culinary experiences as a key driver of tourism. As stated by the study of Wan et al. (2025), local food has consistently been a crucial element in shaping tourists' experiences of a travel destination. It plays an important role in shaping tourists' perceptions and interest in the destination as it represents authenticity. The consumption of local food cuisines embodies the essence of local culture and traditions, offering a diverse array of choices in terms of environment, knowledge, perceived value, authenticity, and quality. Similarly, Juniarta and Suta (2025) said that gastronomic tourism is considered as an innovative strategy to increase the attractiveness of tourist destinations, as experiential tourism gains prominence, local culinary experiences have emerged as powerful tools for cultural engagement and destination differentiation. Moreover, the findings of Garofalo et al. (2024) reveal that people's motivation, supplied food, prior knowledge and past experiences influence gastronomic experiences. The gastronomic experiences in turn affect both satisfaction with the destination and destination loyalty. Thus, gastronomic experiences should be a useful path to support tourism. These findings strongly support the present study regarding the high level of tourists' interest in exotic foods. As it collectively emphasizes that local food such as exotic food in San Fernando, Pampanga are significant for cultural experiences, it may also be a unique travel activity which may become the reason to have an intention to visit a destination. Furthermore, gastronomic tourism enhances destination appeal that influences tourists' travel motivation and satisfaction which explains why tourists show a high level of interest in exotic food.

Research Question 3: How may the level of tourists' intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga be described in terms of Travel motivation and Satisfaction?

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Table 12. Level of Tourists' Intention in Visit San Fernando in Terms of Travel Motivation

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Exotic foods create a motivation for me to visit San Fernando, Pampanga.	4.46	0.81	Highly Interested
2.	I consider exotic food experiences on every trip.	4.46	0.86	Highly Interested
3.	I believe exotic foods influence my travel decisions.	4.60	0.89	Highly Interested
4.	San Fernando, Pampanga is appealing to me because of its unique food offerings.	4.66	0.75	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.545**	**0.06**	**Highly Interested**

Most residents in San Fernando, Pampanga perceive their city very positively as a food tourism destination. For Travel Motivation (Table 12), the overall (mean = 4.54) (standard deviation = 0.61), with all items scoring between 4.60 and 4.66, interpreted as "Highly Interested." This suggests that exotic food experiences strongly influence tourists' decisions to travel, attract them to the destination, and highlight the city's distinctive culinary identity. In addition, the findings of the study show that travelers' motivation for undertaking a journey is significantly influenced by their interest in exotic foods. According to Björk et al. (2021), food is considered a major factor in motivating tourists, as numerous tourists are choosing destinations based on food-related factors. In a similar context, it is worth noting that Ellis et al. (2020) proved that "cuisine plays a significant role in the attractiveness of a destination, considering the large number of tourists seeking to experience culinary activities during their trips. Moreover, Su et al. (2023) established that food experiences contribute to destination competitiveness and influence tourists' intention to undertake a journey. In addition, various studies funded by the World Tourism Organization established that gastronomy is considered a major factor in motivating tourists and undertaking tourism development. In essence, it is evident from the findings of various studies that tourists' exposure to exotic foods is considered a major factor in motivating tourists and undertaking a journey to San Fernando, Pampanga, thereby supporting the findings of the present study.

Table 13. Level of Tourists' Intention in Visit San Fernando in Terms of Satisfaction

	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Trying exotic foods creates my satisfaction in the food experience at San Fernando, Pampanga.	4.66	0.75	Highly Interested
2.	Memorable food experiences increase my intention to revisit San Fernando, Pampanga.	4.70	0.70	Highly Interested
3.	My overall food related experience in San Fernando, Pampanga influenced me to visit.	4.73	0.69	Highly Interested
4.	Satisfaction with exotic food experiences allows me to share San Fernando, Pampanga to others.	4.63	0.80	Highly Interested
	Total	**4.68**	**0.05**	**Highly Interested**

Regarding Satisfaction (Table 16), the average (mean = 4.68), (standard deviation = 0.05), with individual scores ranging from 4.63 to 4.73. Respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction, noting that trying exotic foods creates memorable experiences, encourages repeat visits, positively shapes their overall impression of the destination, and motivates them to share their experiences with others. The findings, therefore, indicate that satisfaction levels of tourists are greatly affected by their experiences regarding exotic foods. Kim et al. (2020), proved that culinary experiences have a substantial impact on overall tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Consistent with this, Sthapit et al. (2022) found that positive gastronomic experiences contribute to the development of tourists' emotional attachment to a specific destination, which in turn stimulates their intention to return. Moreover, Jeaheng (2021) proved that satisfaction with local dishes is a key factor in determining tourists' behavioral intentions. Suhartanto et al. (2023) found that gastronomic satisfaction is responsible for enhancing tourists' perceptions of quality and experience. Therefore, it shows that satisfaction levels regarding exotic foods have a significant influence on tourists' intentions to visit and revisit a particular destination, thereby validating the findings of the current research.

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Table 14. Level of Tourists' Intention to Visit San Fernando, Pampanga Total Domain

Travel Motivation to Satisfaction			
Travel Motivation	4.54	0.61	Highly Interested
Satisfaction	4.68	0.05	Highly Interested
Total Domain	**4.61**	**0.40**	**Highly Interested**

The Total Domain recorded an average (mean = 4.61), (standard deviation = 0.40), also interpreted as "Highly Interested." These results highlight food as a strong cultural element of tourism in San Fernando, Pampanga, effectively turning travel motivation into satisfying experiences. The findings of Onur and Yazıcıoğlu (2024) explored the relationship between foreign tourists' gastronomic travel intentions and their self-congruity, perceptions of culinary brand equity, and loyalty attitudes, it revealed that foreign tourists had positive perceptions of culinary brand equity and loyalty attitudes as their self-congruity toward destination cuisines grew. Brand image and quality perception impacted gastronomic travel intentions. Similarly, Dias and Posheliuznaia (2025), conducted a study about impact of authentic local cuisine on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, as the tourist satisfaction is identified as the most critical factor influencing revisit intention. Moreover, Auriza et al. (2024) stated that there is an influence between destination uniqueness on tourist experience and intention to visit again, the influence of tourist experience on intention to visit again and prove whether tourist experience can mediate the relationship between destination uniqueness and intention to visit again. The research results show that the uniqueness of the destination influences tourists' experiences and also influences their intention to visit again. Other findings show that tourists' experiences have a positive influence on their intention to visit again. Research findings also show that tourist experience can positively mediate the relationship between destination uniqueness and revisit intention. These findings supported the present study which explains that tourists' intention to visit a destination is influenced by travel motivation and satisfaction by what the destination provides overall experience. The food's authenticity significantly influences tourists' intention to return. These studies support by indicating that tourists' intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga may be influenced by its destination uniqueness, and local food experiences.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods and their level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga?

Table 15. Significant relationship between the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods and their level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga.

Coefficient (r)	0.87
N:	5
T Statistics:	3.10
Df:	3
P value:	0.053

The analysis revealed that the level of tourists' interest in exotic foods has a significant positive relationship with their intention to visit the City of San Fernando, Pampanga (r = 0.87). The relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, as supported by a t-value of 3.10 and a p-value of 0.05. This indicates that higher levels of interest in exotic foods are associated with a higher intention to visit the destination. The correlation analysis shows that tourists' interest in exotic foods is significantly associated with their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga. This implies that as interest in exotic food increases, tourists' intention to visit also increases. The result suggests that food-related experiences, particularly exotic cuisine, play a crucial role in shaping tourists' destination choices and travel behavior. This finding is supported by recent studies emphasizing the growing role of food tourism in influencing travel intention. Aziz et al. (2023) found that ethnic and local food experiences significantly influence tourists' intention to visit a destination, highlighting food as a key motivational factor in tourism decision-making. Similarly, Susanto (2023) emphasized that tourists' engagement with local cuisine positively affects their revisit and travel intentions, particularly in culturally rich destinations. In addition, Sukthankar et al. (2025) highlighted that food aesthetic experience and cultural authenticity significantly enhance tourists' behavioral intentions and destination attractiveness. These recent studies collectively support the idea that food tourism plays a significant role in shaping tourists' motivation and destination choice. Overall, the significant relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga suggests that promoting local and exotic culinary experiences can strengthen destination appeal. Enhancing food tourism initiatives may increase tourist arrivals and improve the competitiveness of the destination. Therefore, interest in exotic foods is an important factor influencing tourists' intention to visit a destination.

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Ethical Considerations

The researchers conducted the study in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines governing research involving human respondents. The rights, safety, dignity, and well-being of all participants were prioritized throughout the entire research process. Prior to data collection, necessary permissions and approvals were secured from the institution. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Research Instructor, who reviewed and approved the conduct of the research in accordance with institutional requirements. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all respondents before their participation, ensuring that they were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The principles of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed by ensuring that all personal information of the respondents was protected and that all data were reported in aggregated form only. Participation was voluntary, and all collected information was used strictly for academic and research purposes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that tourists exhibited a high level of interest in exotic foods, particularly in terms of uniqueness, attractiveness, curiosity, willingness to try, and food sanitation. Likewise, respondents demonstrated a high level of intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga, suggesting that the destination's exotic culinary offerings contribute to its appeal among tourists. The findings also indicated a positive relationship between tourists' interest in exotic foods and their intention to visit the destination. However, the relationship was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.053$). Therefore, while greater interest in exotic foods may be associated with a higher intention to visit San Fernando, Pampanga, the results do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that this relationship is statistically significant. Further research involving a larger sample size is recommended to better examine the relationship between these variables and to provide more conclusive findings.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the promotion and sustainability of exotic cuisine as a cultural tourism asset. The Local Government Unit (LGU) of San Fernando, Pampanga is encouraged to further strengthen its initiatives in promoting exotic cuisine as part of its cultural tourism programs, while ensuring the consistent implementation of strict food safety and sanitation standards to maintain tourists' confidence and trust. Moreover, tourism marketers and promoters are advised to emphasize the uniqueness and cultural significance of exotic foods through strategic marketing approaches, including digital promotions, targeted tourism campaigns, and active participation in tourism-related events to reach a broader audience. In addition, restaurant owners and food vendors are urged to uphold proper hygiene practices and ensure high-quality food preparation, as these factors significantly contribute to enhancing tourist satisfaction and fostering positive perceptions of exotic food experiences. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of this study by involving a larger sample size and exploring additional variables such as accessibility, pricing, service quality, and overall destination image, which may further influence tourists' intention to visit and engage with exotic culinary offerings.

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