

# Chapter 16

## Enlivening the Effect of Tourists' Knowledge and Involvement on Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) Towards Food Tourism Image in Malaysia

**Siti Radhiah Omar**

*Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia*

**Shahrim Ab Karim**

*Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia*

**Siti Suriawati Isa**

*Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia*

**Siti Nazirah Omar**

*Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

*This current article aims to empirically test the relationship between international tourist knowledge and Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) cultural involvement on Malaysia's Food Tourism Image and secondly, to analyze the mediating effect of knowledge for both relationships. A quantitative survey of 719 international tourists with previous MHF consumption experience was conducted and analyzed via a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach. Results demonstrated that the following variables have significant associations with Food Tourism Image while knowledge mediated the subsequent links positively with partial mediation. Regardless of the theoretical and managerial implications and research findings, supplementary investigations are warranted to enhance the growth of food cultural tourism.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Manifestation of a particular tourism destination is linked with the core embedded attractions which lure tourists' intention to travel. Tourism attractions act as "pulling" factors which magnetize tourists and influence their decision on choosing a destination (Kim & Kolinsky, 2003) and (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). Generally, Sea, Sand and Sun are the most common reasons for tourist to traveling to a destination (Hobson & Dietrich, 1995). Apart from the aforementioned reasons, more tourists nowadays are keen to perform an international visitation specifically to experience the extraordinary culinary delights (Bessiere, 1998; Chi, Chua, Othman, & Karim, 2013; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004) which appear to be different from their own country food. As supported by Long (2004), Salomonsson (1984) and Renko (2010), food has successfully boosted tourists' experience level and appreciated as one of the most prominent tourism attraction. Therefore, for tourists who wish to taste a new culinary experience, a well-recognized food hotspots' destination will be the best option for them.

Among the most superior countries which hold a food tourism image are Italy, Thailand, France, Australia, Canada (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010), Hong Kong and Singapore (Tsai & Horng, 2012). In the case of Malaysia, it is undeniable that food has become an emerging likelihood motive for traveling (Zakariah, Khuzaimah, & Mohamad, 2012). However, the image of Malaysia as a tremendous food tourism destination is still perplexing since it was overshadowed by the image of pleasant nature, historical and skyscrapers spots (Aziz & Zainol, 2009).

Food, gastronomy or culinary tourism shared a similar concept (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004; Shenoy 2005), and has become an intangible cultural heritage representative for a tourism destination. Significantly, food is perceived to be a powerful reflective mirror of a society. Savoring destination's local authentic cuisines creates opportunities for tourists to immerse themselves in the memorable culture of different peoples (Hjalager, 2002; Long 2004; Wolf, 2002) Correspondingly, Aksoz & Arikan (n.d) and Modigliani (2002) emphasized that the possibilities of tourists re- patron is highly motivated by their involvement in authentic experiences with regard to cultural and heritage attractions. Hence, savoring heritage food with cultural added value is perceived to be important in maximizing the potential of a country to be an outstanding food tourism destination.

Malaysia has showcased its myriad cuisines, as an expression of joyful and idyllic lifestyles of multicultural ethnicities via various food festivals, food trails, Malaysian Kitchen, and other food-related activities that were organized annually by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts, Malaysia (MOTAC). Consequently, more international visitors have shown strong temptation to savor Malaysian food, and planned their holiday vacation to visit Malaysia, as it is among the most outstanding vacation hot spots for "Asia's greatest cuisines meet and mingle" (Hutton, Wendy, & Tettoni, 2005). Therefore, Malaysia has been recognized as a food paradise and also known as the best tourism destination that serves varieties of food to local and international tourists.

However, in a study by (Yoshino, 2010) investigating Malaysia's gastronomic heritage in Japan, Malaysian cuisines are perceived to be similar to Indian and Chinese country food and it is just a hybridization of Asian countries' cuisines. Owing to this view, MHF has been re-defined (Omar, Karim & Omar, 2015) as "typical local culinary, embedded with cultural values that represent the social community lifestyles." Additionally, Yusoff et al. (2013) stated that, Malaysian culinary palates have been recognized as a balance of spice, mild, sour and sweet which originated from Malay, Chinese and Indian as the three major races in Malaysia. Hence, it is crystal clear that MHF could be comprehensively understood as Malaysian cultural gastronomy reminiscence from the folklore, passed to the younger generation and harmoniously

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