


Chapter 14

Delectable Bengali Sweets: A Cultural and Sustainable Food Tourism Experience

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the prospects of sustainable food tourism in West Bengal through Bengali sweets. As Bengal is known for its sweet delicacies all over the world, there has been increasing interest in how this old-age food culture may be safeguarded and promoted using it as a vehicle for sustainable food tourism in West Bengal. The evolution, prospects, and challenges of the Bengali sweet industry are examined in this study. The history, tradition, and transformation of Bengali sweets and their production technique are examined. This book chapter examined the prospects and challenges of the Bengali sweets industry. It provided an overview of the industry and the key prospects and challenges facing the industry. Finally, the paper provided some recommendations for how the industry can address these challenges and continue to grow. This conceptual research study explored the concerns of stakeholders of the Bengali sweet industry and came up with some innovative ideas for the best practices that can lead to socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Bengali sweets, popularly known as “Mishti” in the local language, are an integral part of Bengali culture. They are not only delicious treats for the Bengali community, but also an inseparable part of their daily lives and traditions (Sen, 1996). These iconic sweets are enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds, and are a source of national pride (Dey, 2018). Bengali sweets are also a popular tourist attraction, with people from all over the world coming to Bengal to experience their unique flavors and textures.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in sustainable food tourism. Sustainable food tourism is a type of tourism that aims to minimize its negative impact on the environment and to support local communities. It is a way for tourists to experience local cuisine and culture in a responsible way (Fennell & Bowyer, 2020).

Historical and Cultural Significance: Tracing the history of Bengali sweets back to the 10th century, we uncover their evolution from simple offerings to deities to the diverse and sophisticated confections enjoyed today. We delve into the cultural significance of sweets in festivals, literature, and everyday life, emphasizing their emotional resonance and role in cultural preservation. The article also examines how the introduction of *chhana* (fresh cheese) in the mid-19th century revolutionized sweet-making, leading to the creation of iconic treats like Rosogolla and Sandesh.

Varieties, Production, and Market Overview: The article provides an in-depth look at the craftsmanship behind Bengali sweets, detailing the diverse ingredients, intricate techniques, and the delicate balance of flavors and textures that define each unique creation. We navigate the vast landscape of the Bengali sweets market, analyzing its economic impact, the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises, and the challenges and opportunities presented by exports. The ongoing quest to extend shelf life and cater to health-conscious consumers is also addressed.

Sustainable Food Tourism and Ethical Considerations: The article examines the potential of sustainable food tourism to enhance the Bengali sweets industry. We explore the use of locally sourced ingredients, sustainable packaging alternatives like earthenware and sal leaves, and the integration of solar energy into production processes. Ethical considerations, such as fair trade and waste reduction, are highlighted as integral components of a sustainable approach.

Tourism Initiatives, Authenticity and Consumer Perceptions: Current initiatives promoting sustainable food tourism in Bengal are showcased, including eco-friendly sweet shops, sweet festivals, and community-based tourism experiences. We delve into the concept of authenticity in culinary tourism, emphasizing the importance of preserving traditional sweet-making methods and offering visitors genuine cultural encounters.

Sweet Symphony of Bengali Culture: A History and Cultural Significance of Bengali

Sweets

Bengali sweets are a cherished part of Bengali culture and heritage, with a rich history dating back 10th century (Sen, 1996). The earliest known Bengali sweets were made from jaggery and rice flour and were often offered to deities as part of religious rituals (Ishita. Dey, 2018). Over time, the variety of Bengali sweets has grown to encompass a dazzling array of confections made from milk, sugar, and

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