


# Chapter 26

## Religious and Regional Gastronomy of Varanasi: A Sustainable Tourism Product

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### ABSTRACT

*Varanasi has observed an upsurge in temple, cuisine and cultural tourism, mostly because of city's rich cultural heritage and its organic growth of tourism products. However, a thorough understanding of the connection between tourism and gastronomy with public involvement is lacking. Purpose of this article is to investigate the connection between Varanasi's religious and regional gastronomy and the current growth of tourism. This article uses new approaches like, enlisting places of gastronomical importance, improving knowledge of the socio-historical context, promoting the use of digital tools, working with pertinent stakeholders, and identifying the sustainable gastronomic tourism products of Varanasi. It reveals that there are several management challenges related to religious and regional gastronomy development with community involvement and sustainability in Varanasi. Major findings highlight to the necessity of a creative, vibrant, and systemic foundation for religious and regional gastronomic tourism that is both highly significant and sustainable in Varanasi.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious gastronomy refers to the style of cooking followed in temples of that region. All the temples use locally sourced ingredients that have been used for centuries, however the components used in each religion are different. Coexistence and interconnectivity are the guiding concepts in the selection of ingredients. The majority of temple cuisine is vegetarian, forbidding the use of fish, chicken, meat, and other animal products while permitting the use of dairy. Religious beliefs and customs serve as the foundation for the cooking methods. “Tourism and Religions: A Contribution to the Dialogue of Cultures, Religions, and Civilizations,” investigated the sociology of religions in the context of international travel (UNWTO, 2011). It is imperative for travellers to consume local cuisine since it fulfils their cravings and fulfils their desire for authentic local experiences. The increased mobility of tourists and the effects of globalization have made food demand serve a far more purpose than just feeding people. The native food that is served at locations is attracting more and more interest from tourists. While some tourists visit well-known locations and sample a variety of cuisines, others venture to new locations in pursuit of distinctive and regional cuisine. Experiences with local cuisine and travel destinations are heavily influenced by prior information and experiences.

In essence, sustainable tourism is a collection of multifunctional procedures that have developed with the goals of safeguarding the environment, maintaining cultural traditions, and advancing social justice. It also provides chances for ethical economic growth, raising living standards and employment levels, and building local infrastructure. Thus, various organizations (such as the World Tourism Organization (version)., 2005)) are assisting in the promotion and support of sustainable tourism as well as, where required, the creation of suitable regulatory frameworks. The travel decisions of tourists are largely influenced by primary and secondary tourism products, which makes them crucial components of sustainable tourism for tourism locations (Benur, 2015). Varanasi, also known as Kashi or Benaras, is a popular Hindu pilgrimage site that welcomes thousands of tourists each year. Purans (Hindu mythology) claim that it is the oldest city in the world and the residence of Lord Shiva. The most sacred place for Hindu pilgrims to travel to is Varanasi. Hindus have the notion that anyone who passes away inside the limits of Varanasi will be saved and freed from the cycle of birth and reincarnation. Varanasi is well-known for its many ghats, or river steps, temples, and eateries that are packed with visitors year-round as well as pilgrims who come to bathe in the sacred Ganges River. In addition to being well-known as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, Varanasi has long been a centre of religion, spirituality and cuisine. It is said to have been founded approximately 5000 years ago by Lord Shiva. Several of the oldest Hindu sacred texts and writings, including “The Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Rig-Veda,” mention Varanasi. With its sacred shrine dedicated to Lord Kashi Vishwanath, a manifestation of Lord Shiva, Varanasi is one of the few holy towns revered by Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus equally. (<https://varanasi.nic.in/history/>, n.d.)

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Gastronomic Tourism

Analysing visitor behaviour is a necessary part of studying gastronomic tourism. Aspects like tourists or eating venues have been the focus of studies on the relationship between gastronomy and tourism. Since most travellers’ rely on restaurants and/or other food outlets to meet their basic physiological demands,

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