

Research Paper

Malaysia as a Food-Haven Destination: The Vision and its Sustainability

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Abstract: The paper uses a case study of food and culinary tourism development in Malaysia, to explore the relationship between food heritage, its economic function and tourists. Drawing on qualitative informal interviews with government officers from the Ministry of Tourism, we used an approach based upon a generalisation of knowledge in relation to food as a cultural product in the tourism development plan. Simultaneously, we gathered existing data from the Eighth National Plan (8NP), 2000-2005 to Ninth National Plan (9NP), 2006-2010 and 1Malaysia Tourism Key Performance Indicators (1MTKPI) 2010. Our narrative findings show that food heritage has yet to be incorporated in the national sustainable development plan of tourism. Nonetheless, the food and beverage segment is not totally neglected especially in the national promotional and marketing activity plan. Concomitantly, the country has a vision to be the most competitive food-haven destination in the region. Such conclusions posited are vital for our understanding of the links between food heritage as a cultural tourism product and its sustainability in the global, regional and domestic market. This paper points to the importance of having a comprehensive sustainable culinary tourism development plan that needs to be integrated into the country's national plan. We suggest that the government consider building a supportive policy and planning framework that is conducive to national food heritage development. Simultaneously, they need to be more cautious in making food identity as a commodity tourism product through the current extensive marketing and promotional activities. This could result in negative implications on the sustainability of their food heritage and may risk losing the national cultural integrity value, either through *ethnicisation* or the *de-ethnicisation* processes.

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Introduction

In the recent decade, food heritage has emerged as one of the leading segments in the cultural tourism global business (United Nation World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2012). The cuisine of a touristic destination is widely advertised by many countries (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Essentially, the cultural and heritage assets have been featured prominently in destination-brand strategies. They play a pivotal role in representing the cultural identity of the destination and represent a community's unique feature that evokes strong emotional ties between the tourist and destination (McKercher & du Cros, 2009). In the sense food is one of the best ways to understand the local destination's cultural heritage, it has in turn created a niche tourism demand (UNWTO, 2012). It can also be considered as one of the most essential 'must do' list when visiting a destination. By indulging in the local flavours and culture, tourists are able to experience a 'local social reality' by learning the cultural value and history of the nation. For the visitor to get a glimpse into the culture and get closer to the history and the people of a place, local traditional products play a role, for example, the case of a meal of Voss sheep head in Norwegian food culture (Mykletun & Gyimothy, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that food and culinary tourism are associated with the food and beverage industry. Hence, due to the industry's demand-driven activity nature, it is hard to control the diversification of cuisine and restaurant as part of the national development plan. It deals with tourists and locals who have diverse taste and expectations. For this reason, Hu (2010) explained that modern tourism and hospitality organisations face formidable challenges that revolve around three crucial aspects: (i) consumer demand for higher quality food and of novelty; (ii) government guarantee of food safety by minimising risk factors; and (iii) increased efficiency of owners and shareholders in relation to food consumption. Therefore, cultural heritage spots with tourism potential share a number of common features for a sustainable future as stated below:

They are known beyond the local heritage community; they provide experiences that can be consumed; they are interesting and unique; they are robust; they can absorb visitation; and they are accessible. Most important, they provide the tourist with some compelling reasons to visit, even if they are lower-order attraction.

(McKercher & du Cros, 2009: 33).

For these reasons, the development plan must ensure that the needs, wants and desires of tourists to eat local delicacies are satisfied (Sims, 2010; Tse & Crotts, 2005). For instance, Sims (2010). In the case of the United Kingdom (UK) food tourism, developed a conceptual framework explaining the country's development policy plan and the negotiation of originality to ensure food heritage value and integrity of its cultural aspects are not overly commoditified by the tourism industry. According to her, the government must be able to associate and encourage ethical development and socio-cultural and economic balances. This is because the development of food heritage as part of tourist activity will remain a challenging aspect and a strong factor for the sustainable development of any country. It is imperative to get all related stakeholders to be involved in the national development plan and be dictated by its sustainable core principles, such as Venice Charter (International Councils on Monuments and Sites [ICOMOS], 1994) and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. As suggested by Carlo Pertini, the founder of the slow food movement, food is to be given equal importance as the historical buildings, monuments and nature sites (see also, Slow Food Movement website: *www.slowfood.com*).

Therefore, this paper serves as our first attempt to examine sustainable tourism development in Malaysia by focusing on the food and beverage segment. Malaysia was chosen as a case study based on a number of criteria. First, the tourism industry is a second major economic contributor to the nation (1MTKPI, 2006-2010). Second, unlike its other counterparts from the Southeast Asia region specifically, Indonesia and Thailand, Malaysia is quite new in terms of sustainable tourism development as well as in tourism management. Previously, the government focused and emphasised on promotion and advertisement activities, which were handled by the Malaysian Tourism Board (MTB). Third, the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia (MTM) is new and was officially launched in 2004 by the former Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Badawi (Malaysia Tourism Promotional Board [MTPB], 2012). Nonetheless, despite being a new ministry, the country's tourism industry has achieved numerous remarkable achievements globally (1MTKPI, 2006-2010). Fourth, more importantly, Malaysia has a vision, to be one of the most competitive food-haven destinations at the global level as shown in the current promotional activities, for example, 'Food Asian Trails' (*www.food1fab.com.my*, 2012).

In line with the culinary tourism global trend, Malaysia has also identified, the food and beverage segment as a new potential product since the Eighth National Plan [8th NP] (2000-2005). A few initiatives have been carried out, especially marketing and promotional activities. However, our initial findings show that the country has yet to have a comprehensive sustainable tourism development plan. By taking into consideration the dynamic nature of the global cultural tourism market and the importance of Malaysia having to sustain its competitiveness as a food-haven destination in the region, it is pivotal for the government to consider building a supportive policy

and planning framework conducive to the sustainability of their food heritage as a cultural tourism product. For those reasons, the paper elucidates the importance of food heritage and its economic function, which in turn, explains the relationship between food and tourists from before, during and after their journeys.

Food Heritage and Its Economic Function

Food heritage has been used by many nations, societies and communities as a symbolic border in the convergence of taste. Thus, it can be seen as one of the most ideal identity, identification and nation building tools in a country. Food heritage comprises two significant elements. These are (i) rich cultural value and (ii) historical insights that belong to the societies, which can be traced from their food trails, for instance, the recipe used and technique of cooking. The rich cultural value creates a sense of 'belongingness' and helps to enhance people's pride which in turn could possibly lead to their willingness to conserve and preserve their food cultural heritage. Meanwhile, the historical facts provide knowledge of the past. This could be used as part of efforts to instill people's national ethos that brings 'togetherness' among the people. By doing so, it increases the level of understanding among the people especially those coming from a pluralistic country like Malaysia. The knowledge also helps them to learn and continue to negotiate their cultural differences. This has led to the food cultural diversity becoming the country's valuable asset.

The food culture distinctiveness entices the tourist's curiosity to eat the local delicacies. In fact, Poulain (2008) agrees that food is central to the tourist phenomenon as it provides the opportunity to access the destination's culture and history. For example, France attracts approximately 80 million foreign tourists a year. He explains tourism valorisation increases the interest in local food cultures, which also allows for a revalorisation and re-appropriation by the people of the place. However, the food culture valorisation is not only about the local food culture that is used as a commodity tourism product. Therefore, it is vital to understand the food system context which ranges from production to the consumption level (Poulain, Tibere & Bessiere, 2013: 1337-1344). According to them, the selling of merchandise (farms, poetry and handicraft products), and services during the stay, increases the value of regional products, and in turn stimulate further the local economy.

In the sense, food heritage is socially constructed at the local level, the role of the community in food heritage is not to be taken for granted. They must be able to comprehend the importance of how their daily involvement with food production can benefit them. This could help to produce local products for market consumption. Such daily activities provide the 'social reality scene' for tourist consumption, either edible or non-edible products. However, due to the vulnerability of food culture to the commoditisation forces of the tourism industry, it is imperative to build a conducive

policy and outline strategies to reduce the ethnicisation and de-ethnicisation process, from diluting further the cultural integrity value.

Relationship between Food and Tourists

Food imagination and tourist imagination are often inter-related as part of the construction of identity process, especially between the local actors and tourists (Poulain *et al.*, 2013; Quan & Wang, 2004; Cohen & Avieli, 2004) From the tourist's perspective, the link between food culture and place is established by eating locally which helps to elucidate the symbolical consumption of the geographical history of the place that includes the region, province, climate, history and landscape. In other words, the *sacralisation* of certain tourist sites is used in the local food sector (Berard & Marchenay, 2004). To explicate further, institutional tourism structures are also derived from the available culinary attraction and tourists' needs and desire. Thus, it can be considered as collective rallying points, common frameworks around rural sites which at times become a pilgrimage site for the so-called 'food-tourist' in search of dietary reconciliation. In fact, Amirou (1995) pointed out the similarity between the itinerary of both the tourists and pilgrims created by those acts of collection. It means the self-consciousness of the tourist or pilgrim relate to their decision making process to visit the site. This involves organising their trip, from before, during and after the journey.

Before the Journey

Usually, before visiting any place, people will visualise their forthcoming journey. As the imagination revolves around the intended destination, people will visualise everything related to the place. Whether it is an organised journey or otherwise, the tourist is often beset with excitement mixed with apprehension. Nonetheless, most of the times, it is quite difficult to imagine what to anticipate with the journey due to its location and distance. In order to manage such anxiety, many tourists will gather the visual through literature, film, travel agencies, travel guides, friends and family. Today, most people gather their preliminary information about the journey through social media networks like GoogleTalks, Facebook and Instagram (to mention a few). To a certain extent, these elements influence their mind about the destination and its local food. This perhaps explains why tourists consume the local cuisine and break their routine during the holidays. In other words, human curiosity is one of the strongest inner forces that drive people to explore the world around them and this curiosity varies between individuals (Tse & Crotts, 2005).

Holidays remain as special moments to break away from daily eating habits, which means distancing from dietary restrictions back home. However, it is admitted that is also possible at home due to the diversification of cuisine and restaurant available in most countries. They can always consume the others' food, for example,

exotic cuisine from ethnic restaurants. Thus, the restaurant has become a point of reference for them. Despite, such opportunities, eating a similar cuisine in the country of origin, may bring about a different sense of eating pleasure. It means their trip offers different opportunities of contact with the local food culture, from both tangible and intangible aspects, for example, dishes, ingredients used, local plants and animals, utensils, table dressing, the symbolism of food, social values, hierarchies, etiquette, social links and culinary *savoir-faire*.

The role of travel agencies and travel guides play a significant role in providing the relevant information and guidance, specifically, during the preparation of the intended journey. Many of these establishments are also using current social media networks. They provide a cultural frame of reference and economic and historical backgrounds, which in turn, create a preconceived image of the destination. Their role in formatting such expectations has led to recognition, verification of images and words that are already buried in our memories (Urbain, 1991). Such expectations may not necessarily match the actual site reality. As a result, tourists may not be able to experience the local food culture experience, but in its place the ethnicisation of local cuisine due to the tourism industry itself.

During the Journey

Being in a foreign place, the tourist is forced to discover local food. This elucidates the realms of what is edible, the degree and type of cooking, meal structures, food intake, the body techniques used, table manners, food etiquette, the daily schedules, supply sites, hygiene and many more factors, as the boundary of their food culture compared to the host food culture. At this point, the tourist and host food culture may either converge or diverge. The acceptance of eating the local food and not eating it will depend on their level of food liberalism. As Morin (1962) posited, by eating someone else food – as they do or with them – constitutes an internal journey. It relates to their readiness and decision-making process on what to eat before visiting the restaurant. This decision is largely influenced by the available food guide materials, companionship and the cuisine specialty during their trip.

Nevertheless, the level of access to the local food culture also varies from one place to another. In the so-called local gastronomical notion, two types of catering play significant roles to tourist accessibility. First, promotional showcase in promoting the ‘popular’ catering to tourists. In most cases, these places remain as a social immersion place for tourists to have a local food culture experience. The showcase allows them to fantasise the authenticity of the cuisine, for example, packaged in recipe books which can be purchased by tourists. Further, the packaged culinary products as tourist souvenirs also include the utensils, table dressing and dried ingredients. Second, the non-staging food culture, usually savoured by more adventurous tourists by exploring

beyond the popular sites. They can capture the moment and treasure it as a memorable food journey.

For these reasons, the relationship between the tourist and local food during their trip can be articulated. According to Quan & Wang (2004), the attraction and the level of contact with local cuisine will depend on whether it is psycho-centred or allo-centred. Therefore, Cohen & Avieli (2004) suggest two aspects to be included; the first is 'recreational' and corresponds to a relaxed or even playful relationship with food during the trip; the discovery of local cuisine, even if it is positively perceived, does not constitute a purpose. The second, referred to as 'experimental', is influenced by the search for culinary authenticity. This is a vital element in providing the local experience in tourism. However, Cohen (1972) explained that even though novelty and uniqueness are essential elements in the tourist experience, not everyone is ready to immerse himself wholly in an unfamiliar social environment.

In order to explain why some travellers and tourists are not interested in exploring the local gastronomy, Mallouf (1995) elucidated that health reasons or a simple lack of interest or neophobia may prevent them from looking forward to try exotic cuisine. For example, it is common for Dutch tourists to bring food from their country when they travel (Poulain, Bessiere & Tibere, 2013). Therefore, the adaptation is almost inevitable and could happen in various levels, either in a more or less conscious, unequivocal fashion (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Hence, seen as the unreasonable, unclear consideration of tourist expectations. These aspects become a testament to the importance of awareness raising or training schemes from the local actors (including producers, restaurateurs, waiters/waitresses, distributors who allow for the acquaintance of knowledge of food heritage, its local ownership and the ability to explain it to tourists (Poulain & Tibere, 2006; MacCannel, 1986).

After the Journey

The souvenir is much an inconvertible memory of the tourist's trip as the places visited, in an immutable logic of 'doing' and the photos taken (Amirou, 1995). In fact, Morin (1962: 83) mentioned that (after a vacation) we will attempt to recall the rituals, photos, landscapes, food and many other nostalgic memories. He declares, 'sometimes, the memory of a meal, for instance, chianti reminds us of Italy; paella brings us back to Spain and even 'bouillabaisse' reminds us of the sunshine.' In this sense, these culinary or gastronomic souvenirs remain as a significant experience for them, which they bring from their visit at the place. The souvenir also can be seen as a 'symbol' of their trip either as a gift or personal consumption, for instance, by buying or bringing home local products (like wine and cheese from France). The culinary souvenir allows them to relate between 'here' and there'; and at the same time, could turn into a 'new here' in the everyday life (Urbain, 1991: 256). The souvenir

indirectly ‘reduces’ the distance between the ‘last trip’ and the ‘next’ (Urbain, 1991), as the so-called magic refreshes the memories through images, atmosphere, flavours and smells of the journey by inserting them into the routine of a sedentary life.

However, to note, the traveller or tourist does not only transform himself/herself into a collector of exotic objects, but mixes the ‘worlds’ far-away worlds with the everyday world; free and constrained; new and habitual. In that sense, these culinary souvenirs make the tourists’ experience last. Nevertheless, due to food being a perishable item, the aspect related to eating them, is not enduring, with the exception of certain types of food culture, such as table dressings, wrapped or packaged products for display purpose and recipe books. At the same time, in order not to forget the culinary experience totally, they can go to the restaurants which offer a similar cuisine of the country visited. This also can be deemed as part of a similar process of immersion into the memory of their previous trip. For instance, simply eating with chopsticks after a trip to a Vietnamese restaurant, evokes the memory of their recent (last) visit, in turn, more often, embellished exoticism into everyday life.

Methodology and Limitations

We conducted this exercise by making a comparison with the available empirical evidence in Kuala Lumpur city. We started by examining the Kuala Lumpur Plan [KLPlan](2020), specifically, the food and beverage and entertainment development zone. We found that the the development plan is designed to focus on international food and beverage development, which is expected to help and supplement the current local food sphere. This local development plan has been anticipated as a beneficial effort by the local authority for the tourists and locals. However, based on the current Malaysian Tourism Promotional Board’s (MTPB) promotional and marketing activities as well as the National Plan, we were unable to trace the link between the existing local food sphere and sustainable tourism development. There is a missing link between the local authority development plan and the national development plan.

Simultaneously, we gathered existing data from the Eighth National Plan (8NP), 2000-2005 to, Ninth National Plan (9NP), 2006-2010 and 1Malaysia Tourism Key Performance Indicators (1MTKPI) 2010. The data obtained from those relevant reports, have been used to examine the sustainability of the country’s food heritage. First, we conducted a narrative-content analysis, followed by a qualitative informal interview with three officers from the Ministry of Tourism. We used an approach based upon a generalisation of knowledge, in relation to food as a cultural product in the tourism development plan. Nonetheless, our narrative findings are confined to the scope of discussion and objectives of the study. In view of this limitation, future research is essential to examine Malaysian culinary cultural sustainability by elucidating further the diversity interaction pattern in the local food sphere.

Table 1. Components of tourists expenditure (2008-2010)

Items	2008 (RM Million)	2009 (RM Million)	2010 (RM Million)	Growth %
Accommodation	15,463.1	16,573.8	17,343.2	4.6
Shopping	13,282.4	15,103.1	16,213.3	7.4
Food & Beverages	8,772.3	9,290.5	9,716.7	4.6
Local transportation	5,154.4	5,253.1	5,423.3	3.2
Entertainment	1,486.8	1,594.0	1,751.3	9.9
Domestic airfares	2,428.5	2,274.7	2,259.7	-0.7
Organised tour	2,032.0	2,271.0	2,429.2	7.0
Miscellaneous	941.7	1,007.5	1,355.8	34.6
Total	49,561.2	53,367.7	56,492.5	5.9

Source: 1MTKPI (2010).

Malaysia Culinary Tourism

The Achievement

Evidently, the Malaysian tourism industry has proved itself to be remarkably resilient to the various crises happening around the world (see also the 7th, 8th and 9th Plans), and still managed to maintain its position as the ninth most visited country in the world since 2009 (MTPB, 2012). A total of 24,577,196 tourist arrivals in 2010, contributing RM56.5 billion in tourist receipts and 5.9 % growth (Table 1). The food and beverage segment represented the third highest contributor with a 4.6% increase in growth.

The National Development Plan

The tourism industry is a key foreign exchange earner that provides positive growth, investment and employment, and has continued to strengthen the service account of the balance of payments for the country (9th National Plan, 2006-2010). Hence, high priority has been accorded to achieving a sustainable tourism industry with a more integrated approach to tourism planning and implementation as tabled by the National Plan. As a result, the role of the State Tourism Action Councils (STAC) have been strengthened and are responsible for monitoring, surveillance and evaluation of the project's outcome on a regular basis as seen in the assertion below:

“... Emphasis will be given to preserving and enhancing existing natural and cultural assets that are susceptible to environmental damage. Local authorities and communities will be encouraged to be more actively involved in project preparation, implementation and maintenance to ensure adverse environmental impact is minimised... This is to reinforce, among others, the environmental impact assessment and other relevant guidelines, which

continue to be important considerations when formulating and implementing projects and related infrastructure ... specific criteria and guidelines on carrying capacity of environmentally-sensitive tourist areas such as islands, highlands and coastal areas..."
[9th National Plan, 2006-2010].

Based on the extract, undoubtedly, there were serious efforts towards a sustainable tourism development plan. However, it focuses on environmental damage, and has neglected the intangible cultural aspect, specifically, the food heritage. With the convergence of global taste, it is pivotal to address the de-ethnicisation process elements by taking precautionary measurements to reduce the dilution process in the Malaysian cuisine identity as shown below:

"The preservation and restoration of historical sites, buildings and artefacts will be continued as part of efforts to conserve national heritage as well as increase the number of tourist attractions. In pursuance of this strategy, several historical sites and buildings have been identified for preservation and restoration during the Plan period. These will include Kota Kuala Muda in Kedah, Fort Alice in Sarawak and Bukit Tengkorak Neolithic site in Sabah. Heritage trails will be developed based on specific themes including the Baba Nyonya heritage, the Portuguese and Dutch era in Melaka, war relics in Kota Babru as well as Bunga Mas in Kedah and Kelantan."
[9th National Plan, 2006-2010].

The above extract shows that the government has incorporated the national cultural heritage into the national development plan. However, the preservation and restoration focus is only on the historical sites, building and artefacts. Although, those states mentioned in the plan, have their own regional food culture, it is not deemed as part of the cultural aspects. Under the specific themes, culinary culture is not mentioned, too. It emphasises only artefacts as a tangible cultural aspect.

The Marketing Strategies

"The promotional efforts will focus on a number of areas such as commercial and non-commercial performing arts, museums, art galleries, handicraft and entertainment centres as well as theme parks. Cultural attractions will continue to be promoted to showcase Malaysia's diverse ethnic and cultural festivals. Malaysia will also promote its multi-ethnic population. In this regard, innovative food trails based on distinct specialties of states, regions and communities will be developed to attract tourists to savour local delicacies"
[9th National Plan, 2006-2010].

The food and beverage segment is not totally neglected in the plan. It has been categorised as part of the cultural, entertainment and the arts tourism products. However, it is yet to be incorporated as part of the national development plan. This

segment is a new potential product for Malaysia. Therefore, preliminary focus will be on the promotion and marketing activities only.

“Malaysian food reflects a multiethnic and multicultural society with each state offering unique distinctive delicacies, producing a wide ranging national menu. The menu consists of ethnic flavours as a haven for culinary delights which are available on a 24-hour basis in most places. It also represents an amalgamation of Southeast Asian flavours which have been influenced by both western and eastern cultures.

[Tourism Malaysia Official Website, 2012].

The above assertion describes the diversity of Malaysian cuisine. In fact, culinary diversity has enhanced the Malaysian food heritage value. It reflects unity in diversity as a way of managing the cultural differences among the various ethnic groups in the country. At the same time, it exhibits serious efforts in showcasing Malaysian food trails. As a result, Dato Ng Yen Yen, the then Minister of Tourism launched a website known as, ‘*www.fab1food.com*’ in 2011 to attract tourists to savour local delicacies. The website is entitled: ‘Southeast Asia food trails’ as a celebration of so ‘much’ to serve on the Malaysian plate.

Development and Allocation

Under the 9th Plan, RM1.8 million has been allocated for development of the tourism industry. It appears that the allocation is linked to the National Tourism Sustainable Development Plan (9th National Plan, 2006-2010), a reflection of the importance of the preservation and protection of natural habitats and environmental concerns in the context of responsible tourism. The food cultural heritage budget allocation is meant for promotion and marketing aspects only. This is not much compared to the other programmes, as shown in Table 2.

Further, the interview sessions with Officers A, B and C also indicate that the food and beverage segment has yet to be established as part of the cultural and heritage tourism products. Although the segment has been identified as a new potential

Table 2. Development and allocation for tourism, 2001-2015 (RM million)

Programme	8MP expenditure	9MP allocation
Environment protection and beautification	241.1	652.1
Facilities, infrastructure and maintenance	459.4	1,034.8
Accommodation	31.7	115.0
Others	49.4	46.0
Total	783.6	1,847.9

Source: Economic Planning Unit (EPU) in 9th National Plan, 2006-2010.

product (8th National Plan, 2000-2005), it has not, however, been incorporated into a sustainable national development plan policy except in the promotion and marketing strategy plan. It could be, due to the Ministry's 'age,' which is less than nine years old. Nonetheless, since the verbatim from these officers were obtained during our casual conversation with them, the narrative extract shown below are not to be quoted but must only be used as a supplement to our preliminary finding.

Officer A

"... We don't have anyone in particular in charge of our gastronomic development plan..., because it is not part of the plan; what we have now, is focused on advertisement and promotional activities.."

Officer B

"We had launched our 'jab1food' website last year; last year... it was under the charge of a different officer but you can contact our 'Event Section' for the event; if you want to know about our gastronomic development plan, ... you mean as part of the heritage development plan, we don't have anyone in charge that I know of... I don't think it is part of the plan yet."

Officer C

"... Food and beverage is our new tourism product, but we are only in charge of the advertisement and promotional activities, and for the time-being, we don't have someone to oversee this segment, maybe when the need arises."

The Implications

Based on these three verbatims and Table 2, as well as using our general knowledge in relation to food heritage as a cultural tourism product, we can state that greater efforts have been extended to promotional and marketing activities. However, the evidence shows that the development plan emphasised two main segments, the accommodation and shopping segments. Since Malaysia has a vision to be positioned as one of the most competitive food-haven destinations, it is imperative that we understand the important elements to preserve and enhance the food heritage value from negative impacts for a sustainable future. Thus, a sufficient budget and planning is equally important in this case. At the same time, there is a need to be vigilant in relation to the ethnicisation and de-ethnicisation processes from within the tourism industry itself. This could reduce the cultural integrity value. Therefore, Cooper (2005) suggested that it is pivotal for a national development plan to encapsulate sustainable tourism development to ensure its sustainability in the global, regional and local markets.

Discussion and Conclusion

Globalisation has created a niche market, thus making the tourism industry more diversified. This has certainly put more pressure on Malaysia to be constantly innovating in developing a 'new' product. Evidently, the country has identified the food and beverage segment as their new and improved product in the 8th Plan (2000-2005) and 9th Plan (2006-2010) respectively. The government is aware of the need to diversify and customise the industry and ensure its sustainability as seen in the national sustainable tourism plan efforts. In fact, their cultural tourism segment holds a great potential and is developing rapidly. For those reasons, it is pivotal for the government to consider building a supportive policy and planning framework conducive to the Malaysian food heritage development. There is a need to be more cautious in making their food identity as a commodity tourism product through extensive marketing and promotional activities, that is, to avoid or minimise the risk of losing the cultural integrity value, due to the ethnicisation and de-ethnicisation factors.

With regard to the current tourism strategies, we recommend that the existing environmental and tourism heritage be integrated with food heritage in the national policies and plans for sustainable tourism development. Such considerations can be preceded by understanding the economic function and the relationship between food and tourists, as well as the social and technological dynamics of the globalisation of the tourism industry because the ability to operate under the ever-changing business conditions would require a decision cycle and the responsiveness to face any form of competition. Furthermore, to be more effective, an active role for local society must be initiated, in order to achieve broader and more substantive progress in applying the principles of sustainable tourism development.

In other words, the policy makers must continue to understand, preserve, enhance and integrate the development of culinary culture as a core tourism heritage product. The fact is, the prospects for tourism economic growth do not become brighter without consorted and effective policy making by the government. At the same time, these efforts must be supported by efficient business decisions by other stakeholders, which in turn help to increase competitiveness and sustainability in the global, regional and domestic markets. This collaboration with the relevant stakeholders is definitely beneficial to the people, in the sense, that local people will become aware about their unique and diverse culinary cultures as well as the history of the region. This increases the awareness of the social and cultural aspects of sustainable tourism development with the potential to stimulate new trends in tourist demands.

As for the implementation of such development policies and strategic plans, we suggest three aspects of the relationship between food and tourism be taken as the fundamental guideline. The first is a socio-economic. This is, to be associated with

local development processes and re-strengthening of food subsidiaries in host companies and local areas. The second involves heritage as a collective social construct. It means tourism is constituted by the destination where the food culture is taking place, which is reinforced by the identity formation process in terms of the selection and sharing of the existing diverse Malaysian culture. Finally, a crucial link lies in the tourist's perspective of the food culture of the country. These three aspects elucidate the socio-anthropological interest in food and culture based on the tourist perspective, from before, during and after their trip.

Consequently, the paper demonstrates the complexity of tourism as a research topic. This elucidates the need for a multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine the sustainable tourism development context for the country. The social and cultural aspects need to be integrated into the current national 'responsible tourism' context. Nonetheless, in view of the limitations of our finding and scope, the paper suggests that future research, specifically in the field of sociology and tourism, studies the social interaction pattern in the local food and culinary culture, which would be a beneficial contribution towards a more comprehensive sustainable tourism development for the country.

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