

Exploring the Potential of Food Tourism in Calabar, Nigeria: Cultural Heritage, Economic Impact, and Growth Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Abstract— This study examines the burgeoning potential of food tourism in Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State, Nigeria. Known for its rich culinary heritage and vibrant cultural scene, Calabar offers a unique blend of traditional Efik dishes, immersive food-related activities, and iconic events such as the Calabar Carnival. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research explores tourist awareness and perceptions of indigenous foods, the economic contributions of food tourism, and the role of cuisine in preserving cultural identity. The findings reveal a strong appreciation for Calabar's culinary offerings, with tourists valuing their freshness, flavor, and cultural significance. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent promotion, and hygiene concerns limit the sector's full potential. This study advocates for targeted investments in infrastructure, marketing, and capacity building to position Calabar as a premier culinary destination in Africa, fostering sustainable tourism and economic growth.

Keywords: Food Tourism; Cultural Heritage; Economic Development; Calabar Carnival.

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INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM: MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

Tourism is a phenomenon that is undergoing since ancient times where people have been travelling from one place to another for varied reasons. The places have been known as well as unknown; nearby as well as distant. Their reasons to travel have been many including visiting friends and relatives, meeting new people, exploring a new place, trading, health, religion, leisure, etc. However, in this era of technological advancements, the motivations for travel are evolving towards specificity and novelty, taking the earlier motivations to a different level. Higher disposable incomes are a major propeller for the contemporary people to undertake travel more frequently than they used to, which indeed has boosted up the tourism industry. The number of tourists who are looking for concrete learning experiences is increasing globally, and in this endeavour the gastronomic experience is playing an increasingly prominent part.

Tourism has had numerous definitions. However, the most prominent and comprehensive definition as per UNWTO (2008) is that "Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure.' Therefore, it is evident that tourism involves people leaving their original place of residence and moving to a newer one for any reason. This may happen within a country and between different countries. Hence, we can imply that tourism may ensue to be National or International.

It is essential here to define tourist as well. Link BC (2008) stated tourist is "someone who travels at least 80 km from his or her home for at least 24 hours, for business or leisure or other reasons'. This was further affirmed by the UNWTO (1995) where the tourists were classified into:

1. Domestic (residents of a given country travelling only within that country)
2. Inbound (non-residents travelling in a given country)
3. Outbound (residents of one country travelling in another country)

Hence, it is confirmed that tourism has many approaches and that it involves people to move from one place to another which eventually helps in developing many aspects of this people oriented industry.

CHANGING PARADIGMS OF TOURISM

The archetype of tourism is changing from mass tourism (standardized and rigidly packaged forms of tourism) to more individual, flexible and customised tourism (Tourism Intelligence International, 2012). This gives us a clear manifestation that people are now looking for new and unique experiences and the number of such tourists is expanding universally. In older times, travellers were less informed and hence, they

accepted all the mass tourism products and services as they were offered to the extent that the customers even bought the same souvenirs and even took the same photographs. This was more so because the packages offered were very cheap and hence, the potential tourists didn't mind even surrendering their uniqueness. However, the contemporary tourists are more informed and updated by the virtue of technological advancements and this is why they are more demanding than before. Such shift in the tourists is becoming very challenging for the various stakeholders too as they now have to be continuously updated in offering a competitive product.

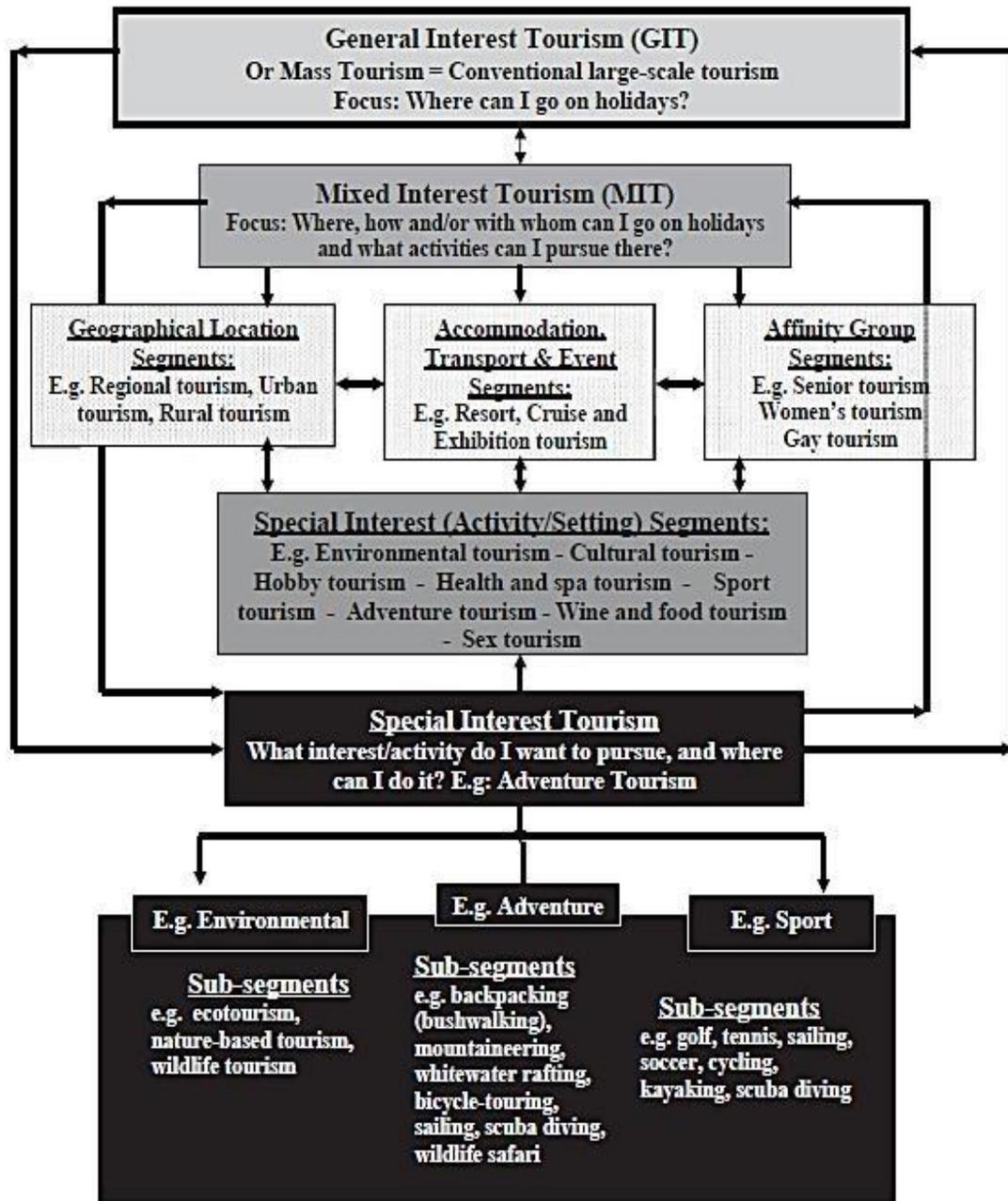
From this, we conclude that the new traveller is seeking not only a distinct experience but also an exclusive attraction and activity at the chosen destination in comparison to the former times where the choice of destination was of primary focus. Opaschowski (2001) (as cited in Agarwal et al, 2018) suggests that for creating a distinct tourism product, an emotional stimulus is to be inculcated as tourists want to buy feelings and not products. They want to personally experience the immaterial qualities, seeking ambiance, aesthetics and atmosphere, looking for an experience full of diversities yet familiarities. Hence, to fulfil these changing needs gave rise to another form of tourism called Special Interest Tourism (SIT).

The term SIT was coined in 1980s (Hall & Weiler, 1992) to mark a distinguishable form of tourism which is more specialised and unique, away from the rigid and stereotyped itineraries that were already prevailing. World Tourism Organisation (1985) (as cited in Trauer, 2006) defined SIT as "the specialized tourism that involved individual or group tours by those people who wish to develop their given interests or visit sites and places that has a relation or connection with their specific interest or subject'

Hence, SIT is a customised tourism, specific to the interests of individuals and groups. This has further been affirmed by the definition of Derret (2001) for SIT as "the provision of customized leisure and recreational experiences driven by the specific expressed interest of individuals and groups'. Therefore, Special Interest Tours have a wide array giving rise to different categories of SIT.

Figure 1. displays Special Interest Tourism Cycle as suggested by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997), Prosser (2001), Ruyss and Wei (2001), Schofield (2001) (as cited in Trauer, 2006) wherein how mixed interest tourism gives rise to special interest tourism and further to its' types is stated.

Figure 1: Special Interest Tourism Cycle



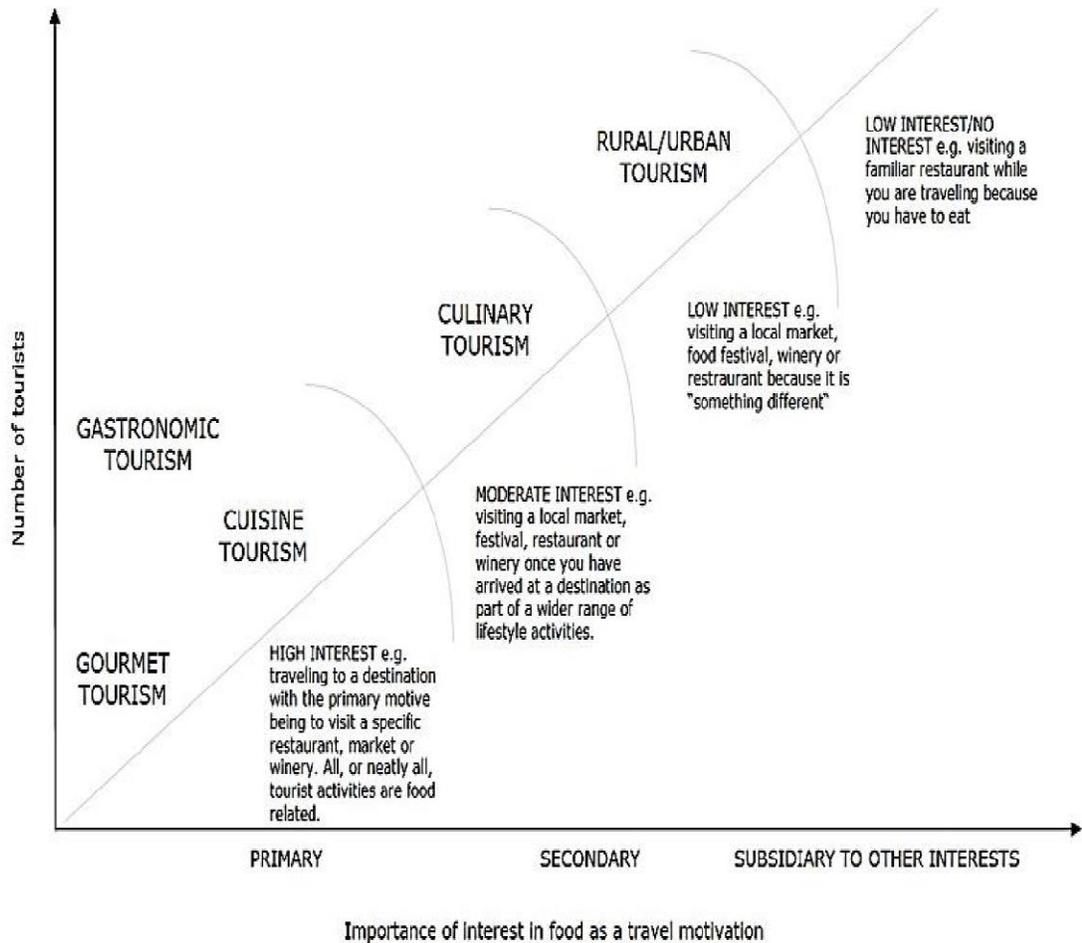
Source: Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997), Prosser (2001), Ruys and Wei (2001), Schofield

(2001) (as cited in Trauer, 2006)

It is clear from Figure 1 that in this endeavour of special interest tourism, the **gastronomic experience** is playing an increasingly prominent part.

Further, based on the interest in food as a travel motivator, Hall & Sharples (2003) in the form of graph (Figure 2), showed a relationship between number of tourists and importance of special interest in food as a travel motivator.

Figure 2: Food Tourism as Special Interest Tourism



Source: Hall & Sharples (2003)

Hence, the graph indicates that the ones who travel with food as a primary or main reason are Gourmet Tourists and as this reason becomes moderate to low, they are termed as culinary and rural/urban tourists respectively (Hall and Sharples, 2003).

FOOD AND TOURISM RELATIONSHIP

Food is in an integral part of an individual's life and has wide spectrum of roles to play, beginning from sustenance to celebrations, which has also been discussed by Mitchell & Hall (2003). In the recent decades, many researchers observed that food and tourism have an effective relationship. This is escalating the attention on food experience offered by a destination. Hipwell (2007) stated that food is forming a major chunk of the

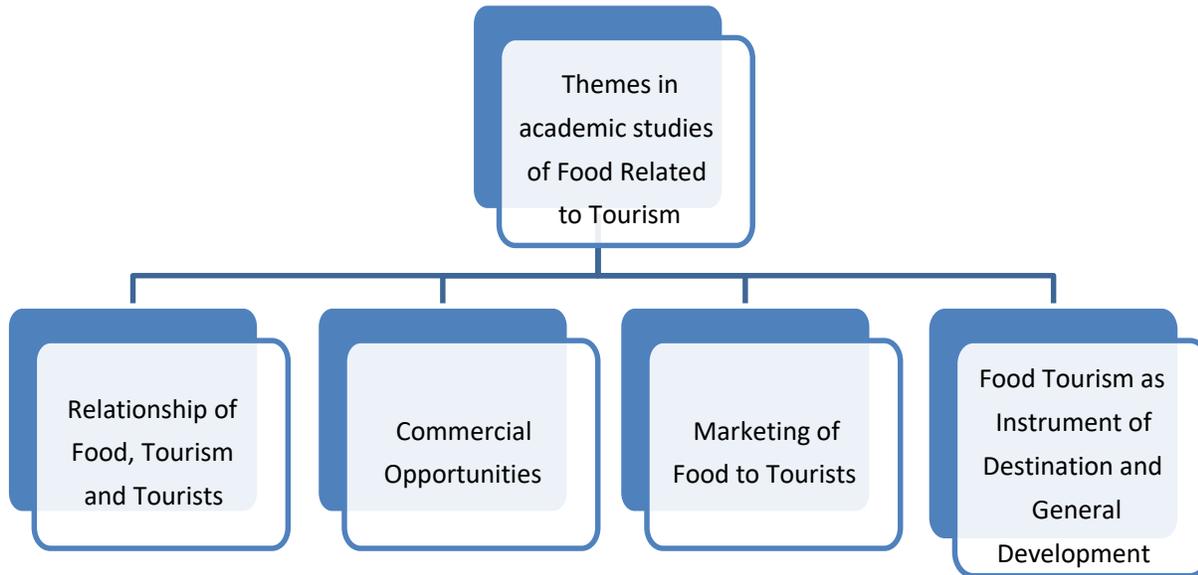
total expenditure done by a tourist at any destination making it to approximately one-third. This affirms that food is an important component in any tourist experience and the cultural image of the destination is reflected by food. Tourist experience enhances through food in addition to their visual and auditory involvements at the place visited. Thus, food has become an important part of the culture of a region as it exhibits intangible heritage (Lee & Scott, 2015).

According to Frochot (2003) food related tourism can allow tourists to achieve the expected levels of relaxation, excitement, escapism, status, education and lifestyle and hence can help adding value to the image of a destination (Boniface, 2003; Boyne et al, 2003; Long 2004). Hall & Sharples (2003) stated that “the social and cultural significance of food is finally gaining the recognition it deserves’ thereby indicating that food is much more than any corporeal requirement (Jones & Jenkins, 2002). In addition, the food and travel connect is further strengthened by the range of television shows and lifestyle channels which has also been discussed by Hall & Sharples (2003). Dining out is a mounting more as a form of leisure where meals are outgrowing their importance as a mere necessity and moving towards a form of pleasure. The overall ambience and occasion in which food is being consumed is adding to the leisure experience as much as the taste of the dish.

According to Urry (2002) “tourism should involve various sensescapes, such as soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes, the geography of touch, in addition to landscapes’ This was also highlighted by Dann & Jacobsen (2002) that tourists also have a chase for smellscapes and this ventures into tastescapes as a motivation to tourists (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Henderson (2009) stated that food image of a destination or country was playing crucial role in its branding. According to Henderson (2009) (as cited in Lee & Scott, 2015), there are four different themes in academic studies of food related to tourism (Figure 3):

- (1) “The relationship of food, tourism and tourists - examining tourist behaviour with relation to food. Food conveys meaning and may evoke authenticity, identity, cultural values, nostalgia, or neophobia (Fischler, 1988; Verbeke & López, 2005);
- (2) commercial opportunities: food as a tourist product – discussing issues such as cooking schools, interpretation of farms and food plants, food or wine drive circuits or tours, and, of course, dining as a product itself (i.e. culinary and gastronomic experiences) (Longart, 2010; Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003);
- (3) the marketing of food to tourists, including topics such as provision of basic information about hygiene and food availability (i.e. halal food availability) and food as a dimension of destination image (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; MacLaurin, 2001); and
- (4) food tourism as instrument of destination and general development, which examines the strategies, economic returns and competitive advantages of food related tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Long, 2004)’

Figure 3: Themes in Academic Studies of Food Related to Tourism



Source: Adapted from Henderson (2009) (as cited in Lee & Scott, 2015)

This gives a clear revelation that there is a definite connect of food with tourism and that now academia is beginning to focus on this connect with a deeper sense of research to provide a better practical understanding. Therefore, it is concluded that food and tourism strongly synergise and that food provides a commercial opportunity as a tourism product.

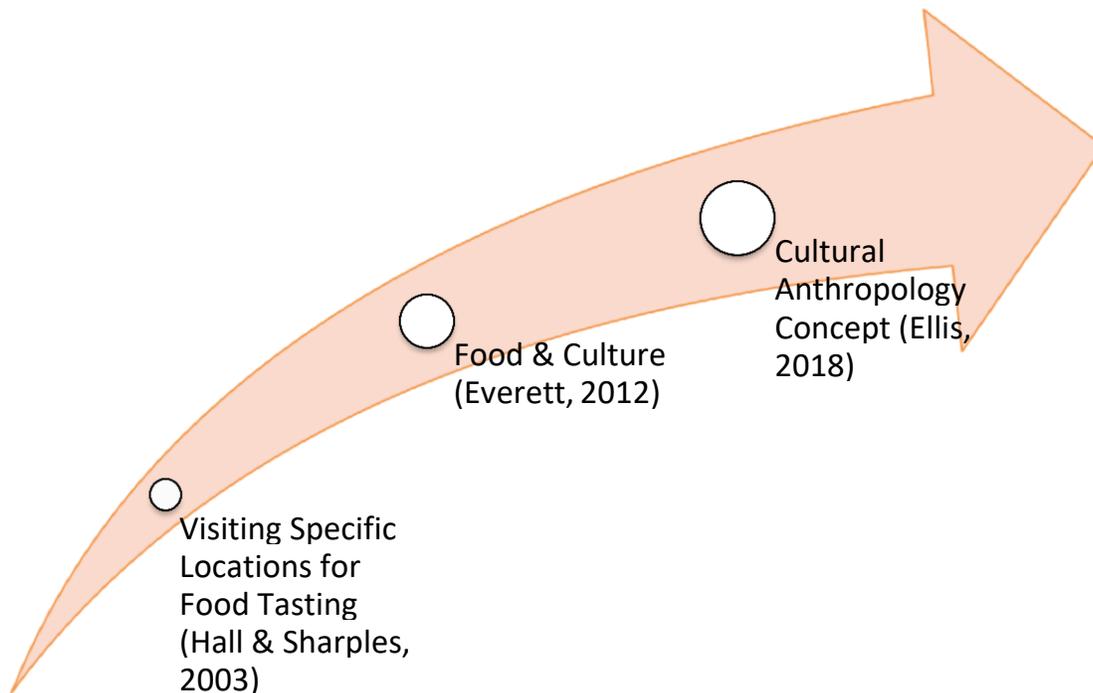
As academia began to explore this aspect of relationship of food with tourism, many names to this special interest tourism began to emerge which are discussed in the further sections.

FOOD TOURISM

The definition of food tourism has been evolving since many years now. According to WFTA (2018) the simplest explanation is “Food tourism is the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place.’ Earlier definition of Food Tourism by Hall & Sharples (2003) (as cited in Ellis et al, 2018) stated that it is defined as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel’.

As the times progressed, the definition of food tourism shifted towards food and culture (Everett, 2012) (as cited in Ellis et al, 2018). Figure 4 depicts the evolving definition of Food Tourism.

Figure 4 : Evolving Definition of Food Tourism



Source: Adapted from Everett (2012) (as cited in Ellis et al, 2018)

Ellis et al (2018) analysed the definitions of food related tourism as given by the various researchers and the concluded that each term means different in relation to guest-host structure of tourism. According to them, “Food Tourism is Cultural Anthropology Concept’ and “food tourism is a presentation of history and place, that is, haggis and Scotland, Bakewell tarts, Stilton cheeses or Kimchi and Korea’. This gives indication that food tourism is a broad concept and it involves many aspects beyond food also like culture and human societies.

CULINARY TOURISM

Culinary Tourism also has been defined by many researchers and has undergone many variations. International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA) (2006) (as cited in Smith & Xiao, 2008) defines culinary tourism as dining while on vacation and —something every visitor does thereby making it very broad. Smith & Xiao (2008) accentuated that culinary tourism engages local culture as it swirls around local ingredients. The importance of local ingredients was emphasised by Ontario Ministry of Tourism (2005) (as cited in Smith & Xiao, 2008). WFTA (2018) defines culinary tourism as “the pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences’. It also brings out the connection of culinary tourism with culture and adventure as the local food instantly offers a direct connection with the destination.

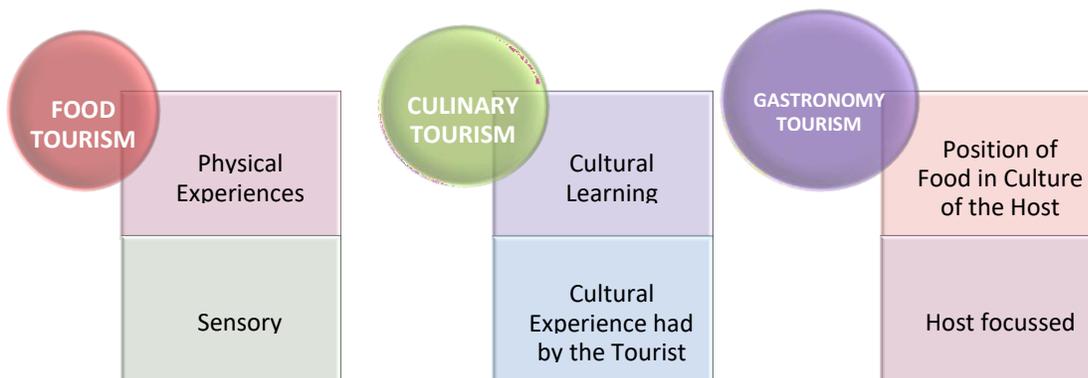
Long (2004) (as cited in Green & Dougherty, 2008) refers “food and cultural tourism as culinary tourism’ while Green & Dougherty (2008) also opine that culinary tourism concentrates on food dishes from the culture of host region. These food dishes could be in any stage right from growing in farms to being consumed in restaurants. The duo also stated that the phenomenon of culinary tourism encompasses both on and off farm activities including visits to farms with intent to learn the indigenous specialities as well as visits to restaurants for experiencing the local specialities and foods.

GASTRONOMY TOURISM

Lee et al (2005) (as cited in Gheorghe et al in 2014) defines gastronomic tourism “is a journey, in regions rich in gastronomic resources, to generate recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes, which include: visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomic festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings or any activity related to food’

Hegarty & O’Mahony (1999) relates gastronomy with the **culture and lifestyle** of the destination. This was further streamlined by Ellis et al (2018) where they clearly distinguished the salient features of the three frequently used terms in food related tourism i.e. food tourism, culinary tourism and gastronomy tourism. This is represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Distinguishing features between Food Tourism, Culinary Tourism and Gastronomy Tourism



Source: Adapted from Ellis et al (2018)

Therefore, the discussions by various academicians and researchers helped to learn that the terms related to food and tourism may have been addressed differently yet they all convey that ‘**food**’ is the **main idea** and that the local environment and culture of the destination has a major contribution to the real taste of the food offered as tourism product.

FOOD RELATED TOURISM PRODUCTS

According to UNWTO (2019), food has become an essential attraction to differentiate between tourism destinations and that gastronomy tourism has become a market segment in itself. It stated that there is lack of well-defined, standardised definition of gastronomy tourism and the research methodology that should be used in the studies related to this field. This is due the fact that gastronomy tourism is a multidisciplinary area involving many domains like history, physics, chemistry, cooking, economics, etc. to name a few (Savarin, 1994). Usher (1997) indicated that multidisciplinary perspective makes gastronomy and food related studies “a foundationalist approach that invalidates the assumptions of knowledge founded in boundary-defined disciplines’ Best and Kellener (1997) (as cited in Scarpato, 2002) further stated that gastronomy studies are instead transdisciplinary and involves relating to more than one branch of knowledge. This complex reality involved in the studies related to food and tourism makes it difficult to follow the conventional research methods as for other disciplines (Usher, 1997; Savarin, 1994; Symons, 1999). Instead the research methodology for the gastronomy related researches involves unconventional approaches and flexibility as the “in gastronomy studies the dichotomy objective–subjective is subverted’ (Symons, 2000).

The academic idea of research in case of gastronomy studies go in contrast to the dominant areas as it involves a special kind of methodology to validate the knowledge about a society and research related to food cannot simply embrace conventional research methods (Usher, 1997). According to Heldke (1992), the research methods for gastronomy studies are not standardized and involve a thoughtful practice (which is an unprecedented way of defining gastronomy related activities and research). It is opposite to the traditional approaches where observations were assumed to be value-neutral and atheoretical and believed that observations and opinions cannot be interpreted.

Gastronomy Tourism today cuts across many tourism products and it has expanded its domain further to other areas of tourism at different destinations than being confined to only local gastronomy products by being a part of various other activities that are possible in the destinations (UNWTO, 2019). This makes gastronomy products open to a large number of attributes and participants thereby making the field broader, richer and more satisfactory as it allows more tourism activity than if considered as a single attraction. Such diversity and integration that gastronomy tourism and its products provide, leads them create an overall enhancement in tourism at any destination. Thus, the diverse nature of food related tourism provides huge range of options to all who are willing to develop a food related tourism product. Smith & Xiao (2008) (as cited in Everett & Slocum, 2013) presented a table (Figure 6) which highlighted the array of tourism product offerings from facilities to events, activities and organisations.

Figure 6: Facilities, Events, Activities and Organisations of Food Related Tourism

Facilities	Events	Activities	Organisations
<i>Buildings/structures</i>	<i>Consumer shows</i>	<i>Consumption</i>	
Food processing facilities	Food and drink shows	Dining at restaurants	Restaurant classifications or certification systems (e.g. Michelin, Taste of Scotland)
Wineries/breweries	Cooking equipment (kitchen shows)	Picnics utilising locally-grown products	
Farmers' markets	Product launches	Purchasing retail food/beverages	Food/wine classification systems (organic, etc.)
Food stores	<i>Festivals</i>	Pick your own operations	Associations (e.g. Slow Food)
Food-related museums	Food festivals	<i>Touring</i>	
Restaurants	Wine festivals	Wine regions	
<i>Land uses</i>	Harvest festivals	Agricultural regions	
Farms		City food districts	
Orchards		<i>Educational observation</i>	
Vineyards		Cooking schools	
Urban restaurant districts		Wine tasting/education	
<i>Routes</i>		Visiting wineries	
Wine routes		Observing chef competitions	
Food routes		Reading food, beverage	
Gourmet trails		Magazines and books	

Source: Smith & Xiao (2008) (as cited in Everett & Slocum, 2013)

From Figure 6, it is concluded that the form of tourism which relates to food is equipped with a boundless spectrum of attractions spanning from gourmet trails to food festivals to visiting farms for local food.

Caliskan & Yimilaz (2016) described gastronomic tourism products “as products that tourists can consume during their travels or use for a while, include gastronomic factors (like foods-drinks) at its heart and services or factors formed by the combination of these’ These may include visiting local restaurants, cookery schools, food and wine festivals, vineyards, food and wine routes (Yun et al, 2011), farms etc. Ignatov & Smith (2006) and Smith & Xiao (2008) (as cited in Caliskan and Yimilaz, 2016) further strengthened this by classifying the resources for gastronomic tourism products in four categories i.e. facilities and opportunities, activities, events and organizations. The same has been given in Table 1.

Table 1: Typology of Culinary Tourism Resources

Facilities	Buildings / Structures	Food processing facilities Wineries Breweries Farmers’ markets Food stores Food- related museums Restaurants
	Land uses	Farms Orchards Vineyards Urban restaurant districts
	Routes	Wine routes Food routes Gourmet trails
Activities	Consumption	Dining at restaurants Picnics utilizing locally-grown produce Purchasing retail food and beverages
	Touring	Wine regions Agricultural regions City food districts

	Education/Observation	Cooking schools Wine tasting/ education Visiting wineries Chef competitions Reading food, beverage magazines and books
Events	Consumer shows	Food and wine shows Cooking equipment, kitchen shows Product launches
	Festivals	Food festivals Wine festivals Harvest festivals
Organisations	Restaurant classification/ certification systems (e.g. Michelin, Taste of Nova Scotia) Food/ wine classification systems (e.g. VQA) Associations (e.g. Cuisine Canada, Slow Food)	

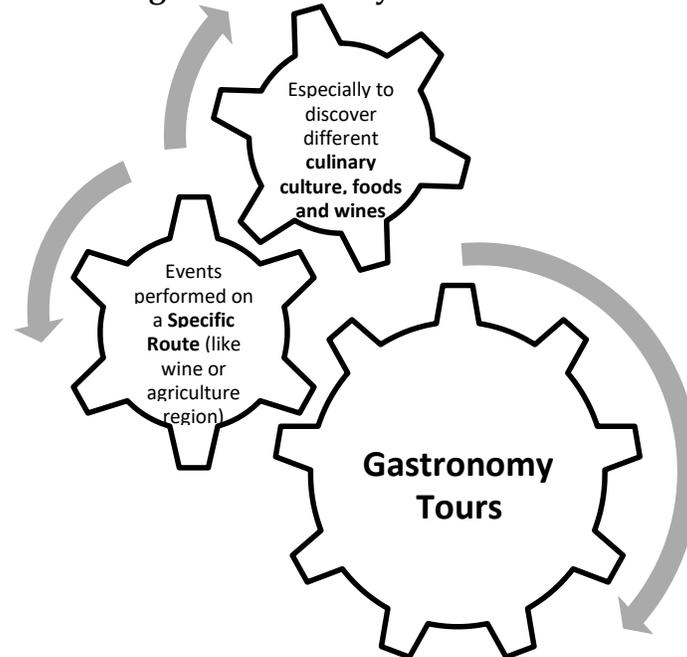
Source: Ignatov and Smith (2006); Smith and Xiao (2008) (as cited in Caliskan and Yimilaz, 2016)

This classification suggests that a potential gastronomic tourism destination can develop on any specific product it has and accordingly work on the facilities needed. This also has to be complemented by quality checks through appropriate institutions for the tourist's safety while consuming that gastronomy product.

Nebioglu (2016) emphasised on classification of gastronomic tourism products into four categories as:

- “A food and beverage product which is peculiar to a region
- Restaurants serving local products
- Activities such as festivals serving local products
- Tours held facilities producing gastronomic products (Scarpato 2002; Corigliano 2002; Smith and Xiao 2008; Yüncü 2010)’

Caliskan and Yimilaz (2016) indicated that the main gastronomic tourism products are gastronomy tours, factories (wine, beer), farms and farmer markets, cooking courses, festivals, museums and restaurants. Figure 1.8 gives a basic understanding of gastronomy tours.

Figure 7: Basic understanding of Gastronomy Tours

Source: Adapted from Kivela and Crofts, 2006 (as cited in Caliskan and Yimilaz, 2016)

Gastronomy Tours give umpteen of opportunities for destinations and stakeholders to develop and curate specific routes like wine routes, food routes, gourmet trails etc. This will enable a tourist to choose from a wide range of options and also they can suitably be combined so as to generate sustainable economic development of the destination.

FOOD TOURISM IN CALABAR

Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State in Nigeria, stands out as a prime destination for food tourism in West Africa. Renowned for its rich culinary heritage and cultural vibrancy, Calabar offers visitors a unique gastronomic experience that highlights the diverse flavors and traditions of the Efik people. Food tourism in Calabar is not just about dining; it is an immersive cultural journey that combines history, heritage, and hospitality. One of the most celebrated aspects of Calabar's food tourism is its traditional cuisine, which features iconic dishes such as *Edikang Ikong* (a vegetable soup), *Afang Soup* (made with water leaves and wild spinach), and *Ekpang Nkukwo* (a pounded cocoyam dish wrapped in cocoyam leaves). These meals are deeply rooted in the Efik culture, often prepared with fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Visitors to Calabar can experience these delicacies in various settings, from bustling local markets to high-end restaurants and community food festivals.

The annual Calabar Carnival, often dubbed "Africa's Biggest Street Party," is a key driver of food tourism in the city. This month-long festival attracts thousands of tourists and features an array of food stalls and culinary showcases alongside music, dance, and cultural displays. The carnival provides a platform for local chefs and food entrepreneurs

to present traditional and innovative dishes to a diverse audience. Beyond the carnival, food tourism in Calabar includes experiences such as cooking classes, guided culinary tours of local markets, and visits to farms where key ingredients like yam, cassava, and spices are cultivated. These activities offer tourists a deeper understanding of the region's agricultural practices and their connection to local cuisine. Despite its potential, food tourism in Calabar faces challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited international promotion, and a lack of structured food tourism packages. Addressing these issues could position Calabar as a leading culinary destination in Africa, attracting food enthusiasts from across the globe and boosting the local economy.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the role of indigenous foods in tourism and the perceptions of tourists in Calabar, Cross River State. The aim was to identify the indigenous foods and beverages available, assess tourist awareness, and gauge their perceptions and preferences regarding local food offerings.

Research Design

The research utilized a descriptive survey design, which is suitable for exploring the awareness and perceptions of tourists about indigenous foods and beverages. The descriptive approach helped to capture tourists' responses regarding the availability, appeal, and cultural significance of indigenous foods, as well as the factors influencing their dining choices.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised domestic and international tourists visiting Calabar. A total of 200 tourists were surveyed, with a random sampling technique used to ensure a broad representation of various tourist demographics. The sample was composed of 100 male and 100 female participants, aged 18 years and above, who had either stayed in Calabar for at least 24 hours or were on guided tours.

Data Collection

Data were collected using two primary tools:

1. **Questionnaires:** A structured questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on tourists' awareness, perceptions, and preferences regarding indigenous foods in Calabar. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions, assessing the level of agreement on various statements about local foods and beverages. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample of tourists to ensure clarity and reliability.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local restaurant owners, chefs, and food vendors in Calabar to understand the availability of indigenous foods, the preparation methods, and the challenges in promoting these

foods to tourists. This qualitative data helped to complement the survey responses and provide deeper insights into the local food culture.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the calculation of means (\bar{x}) for each item. A mean score of 3.5 and above was considered to indicate a positive or accepted perception, while a mean score below 3.5 was considered negative or rejected. The quantitative data were further analyzed using frequency distributions and percentages to present a clear picture of tourists' awareness and perceptions of indigenous foods.

Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Key themes were identified regarding the types of indigenous foods available, the challenges in food tourism, and the strategies employed by local businesses to promote local foods. This thematic analysis helped provide a contextual understanding of how indigenous foods are integrated into the tourism experience in Calabar.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar, Cross River State

The indigenous foods and beverages identified in the study area are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar, Cross River State

Beverages		Name	Sources
Non-alcoholic		Kunu	From sorghum
		Palm wine	From palm sap
		Zobo	From hibiscus flower
Alcoholic		Fufu (local wine)	From cassava
		Burukutu	From millet and sorghum
Foods	Types	Basic Ingredients	
Local Stew	Afang soup	Afang leaves and goat meat	
	Edikang Ikong	Spinach and meat	
	Bole (roasted plantain)	Plantain	
	Porridge	Yam or cassava	

Foods	Types	Basic Ingredients
	Abacha (African salad)	Cassava
	Jollof rice	Rice, tomato, spices
	Vegetables	Types
		Spinach
		Pumpkin leaves
		Rosella leaves

Source: Researcher’s Field Work, 2024

The identified indigenous foods and beverages in Calabar reflect a rich culinary heritage, drawing on local resources like cassava, sorghum, palm, and various tropical fruits and vegetables. This study aligns with El-Mezayen, El-Zeftawy, and Hassan (2020), who emphasized the diversity of indigenous food and beverage offerings in local Nigerian communities. Additionally, the findings echo Haikier’s (2012) assertion that promoting local food can highlight wild, fresh, and high-quality products.

Awareness of Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar

Table 3 presents the awareness levels of indigenous foods and beverages among tourists in Calabar. The results show that:

- **Indigenous food and beverages are always available (x = 4.8).**
- **Tourists often request indigenous foods due to their edibility (x = 4.8).**
- **Indigenous foods and beverages have significant health benefits (x = 4.3).**
- **Tourists prefer to be served indigenous foods during their visits (x = 4.3).**
- **Indigenous foods and beverages are welcoming to tourists (x = 4.3).**
- **They are quick to prepare (x = 4.2).**
- **Indigenous foods and beverages are well prepared (x = 4.1).**
- **They are affordable for tourists (x = 3.9).**
-

Table 3: Awareness of Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar

S/N	Statement	Mean (x)	Remark
a.	Indigenous food and beverages are always available	4.8	Accepted
b.	Tourists request indigenous food and beverages because of their edibility	4.8	Accepted
c.	Indigenous food and beverages have health benefits	4.3	Accepted
d.	Tourists prefer indigenous foods during their visit	4.3	Accepted
e.	Indigenous food and beverages are welcoming to tourists	4.3	Accepted
f.	Indigenous foods and beverages are quick to prepare	4.2	Accepted
g.	Indigenous foods and beverages are well prepared	4.1	Accepted

S/N	Statement	Mean (x)	Remark
h.	Indigenous foods and beverages are affordable for tourists	3.9	Accepted

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2024

The results indicate that tourists in Calabar are well aware of indigenous foods and beverages, and there is a strong demand for these items. This aligns with Baby and Joseph (2023), who argued that awareness of local foods at a destination can attract more tourists seeking authentic culinary experiences.

Tourists' Perception of Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar

Table 4 highlights tourists' perceptions of indigenous foods and beverages in Calabar. The results show that:

- Indigenous foods are memorable (x = 4.8).
- Indigenous foods and beverages are fresh and flavorful (x = 4.7).
- Tourists associate indigenous foods with historical and cultural significance (x = 4.5).
- Tourists view indigenous foods as representative of the region (x = 4.5).
- Indigenous foods are seen as better alternatives to processed foods (x = 4.5).
- Indigenous foods are not well served in restaurants (x = 4.4).
- Delays in service are reported for indigenous foods (x = 4.3).
- Hygiene concerns affect tourists' perception of these foods (x = 4.2).
- Tourists appreciate indigenous foods (x = 4.2).
- Tourists generally have a positive perception of indigenous foods (x = 4.1).

Table 4: Tourists' Perception of Indigenous Foods and Beverages in Calabar

S/N	Statement	Mean (x)	Remark
1.	Indigenous foods give memorial significance	4.8	Accepted
2.	Indigenous foods and beverages are fresh and flavorful	4.7	Accepted
3.	Tourists attach indigenous foods and beverages to historical culture	4.5	Accepted
4.	Indigenous foods and beverages represent the region	4.5	Accepted
5.	Indigenous foods and beverages are better alternatives to processed foods	4.5	Accepted
6.	Indigenous foods and beverages are not well served in restaurants	4.4	Accepted
7.	There are delays in the service of indigenous foods and beverages	4.3	Accepted

S/N	Statement	Mean (x)	Remark
8.	Hygiene concerns affect tourists' perceptions of indigenous foods	4.2	Accepted
9.	Tourists appreciate indigenous foods and beverages	4.2	Accepted
10.	Tourists have a positive perception of indigenous foods and beverages	4.1	Accepted

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2023

The findings show that tourists have a generally positive perception of indigenous foods, recognizing their freshness, flavor, and cultural significance. However, there are some concerns related to service delays and hygiene, which need attention. These results corroborate Kivela and Crofts (2005), who found that local foods often hold a special appeal to tourists, and Kim et al. (2022), who noted that tourists' perceptions of local food contribute significantly to their overall travel experience.

Economic Impact of Food Tourism

Food tourism emerged as a significant driver of economic activity in Calabar. Quantitative data showed that tourists allocated approximately 25% of their travel budgets to food-related activities, including dining, food tours, and purchases of local food items such as spices and dried fish. During peak tourism periods, such as the Calabar Carnival, local restaurants and food vendors reported a 40% increase in revenue. Further analysis revealed that food-related enterprises created substantial employment opportunities in the region, particularly for women and youth who dominate the informal food sector. For instance:

- Local food markets, like Marian Market, experienced increased patronage, boosting sales for farmers and food processors.
- Small-scale food vendors, including those selling street food such as *Suya* and *Akara*, reported higher income levels, particularly during tourism events.

Despite these gains, stakeholders identified challenges in sustaining year-round economic benefits. The tourism sector's dependence on seasonal events like the Calabar Carnival means food vendors and restaurants often experience significant revenue declines during off-peak periods. Diversifying tourism offerings and promoting food tourism beyond these events could help stabilize incomes and foster continuous economic growth.

Role of Food in Cultural Preservation

Food tourism plays a vital role in preserving and promoting the rich culinary traditions of the Efik people. Interviews with local chefs revealed a strong sense of pride in showcasing Calabar's iconic dishes to a global audience. These traditional meals are

not merely sustenance but also expressions of cultural identity, storytelling, and community values.

For instance:

- *Ekpang Nkukwo*, a labor-intensive dish, is often associated with communal gatherings and celebrations, making it a key cultural artifact.
- *Afang Soup* and *Edikang Ikong*, renowned for their health benefits and rich flavors, serve as culinary ambassadors, drawing attention to the region's agricultural bounty.

However, there is a growing concern among chefs and cultural experts about the potential loss of authenticity due to the commercialization of these dishes. As food tourism expands, some vendors may adopt shortcuts or dilute traditional recipes to meet demand. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of culinary education and certification programs to ensure the preservation of Efik culinary heritage while catering to tourist expectations.

Challenges in Developing Food Tourism

The research identified several barriers to the full realization of food tourism's potential in Calabar:

1. **Infrastructure Deficits:** Poor road networks and inadequate transportation options make it difficult for tourists to access rural areas where authentic culinary experiences are often found. Furthermore, the lack of proper storage facilities and cold chains affects the quality and availability of perishable ingredients.
2. **Limited Marketing and International Promotion:** Despite its culinary richness, Calabar's food tourism potential remains under-promoted on global platforms. This limits its ability to attract international food enthusiasts and position itself as a competitive gastro-destination.
3. **Inconsistent Policy Support:** Stakeholders highlighted the absence of a coherent policy framework to support food tourism. Many food vendors and restaurateurs lack access to loans or grants to expand their operations, and there is minimal government investment in culinary training programs or infrastructure development.
4. **Hygiene and Safety Concerns:** While local food stalls and street vendors offer authentic experiences, inconsistent hygiene practices deter some tourists, particularly those traveling with families or from countries with stringent food safety standards.

Opportunities for Growth

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for expanding food tourism in Calabar:

1. **Integration into Broader Tourism Packages:** Tour operators can incorporate culinary experiences into existing tourism offerings, such as guided food tours, cooking classes, and farm-to-table dining experiences. Highlighting these as part of larger cultural or adventure tourism packages could attract a diverse audience.
2. **Expansion of Food-Focused Events:** Building on the success of the Calabar Carnival, the city could introduce year-round food festivals, food truck fairs, or themed culinary weeks

that celebrate specific dishes or ingredients. These events would attract repeat visitors and provide a platform for local chefs and vendors to showcase their talents.

3. **Culinary Trails and Experiences:** Developing culinary trails that guide tourists to local eateries, street food hubs, and markets could enhance their exploration of Calabar's food culture. These trails could be mapped and promoted through digital platforms and brochures.
4. **Leveraging Digital Marketing:** The use of social media, food blogs, and influencer partnerships can significantly boost awareness of Calabar's culinary offerings. Storytelling through digital platforms, featuring the history and preparation of iconic dishes, would appeal to a global audience.
5. **Capacity Building for Local Vendors:** Training programs focused on food presentation, hygiene, and customer service would enhance the quality of food tourism experiences while empowering local entrepreneurs.

Sustainability Considerations

To ensure the long-term success of food tourism in Calabar, sustainability must be prioritized. This includes promoting environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing food waste, using eco-friendly packaging, and supporting local farmers through farm-to-table initiatives. Encouraging tourists to visit during off-peak seasons can also help distribute economic benefits more evenly throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

The analysis highlights the untapped potential of food tourism in Calabar, which has the capacity to drive economic growth, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance the overall tourism experience. By addressing infrastructural deficits, enhancing marketing efforts, and investing in stakeholder capacity building, Calabar can position itself as a premier food tourism destination in Africa. With its rich culinary traditions and vibrant cultural landscape, Calabar offers a unique opportunity to showcase the flavors of Nigeria to the world.

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