



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Food tourism as a driver of economic and cultural development in Nueva Ecija, Philippines

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Abstract

This study explores culinary tourism in Nueva Ecija, focusing on visitor perspectives and identifying unique culinary gems that make the province an attractive destination for foodies. It used quantitative research design to understand tourists' preferences, motivations, and challenges in food tourism in Nueva Ecija. It aims to promote culinary delicacies and enrich the province's culinary offerings. The study reveals that 54% of respondents aged 18-22 are employed with an average monthly income of 5,000-10,000 pesos. Most are college graduates and know local food in Nueva Ecija through social media. Most have visited Gabaldon, Cabanatuan City, Laur, Muñoz, and Bongabon, using public vehicles and staying for at least one day. Puno's Ice Cream & Sherbet is the top ice cream provider in Nueva Ecija, while Tokneneng/Kwek-kwek, a street food with hard-boiled quail eggs and flour, is the most popular. The study found that Nueva Ecija offers a wide variety of local food establishments, with delicious and tasty options, and a satisfied rating for cost, sanitation, and safety. The data indicates that demographic factors like age, sex, and income do not significantly influence the motivation to visit Nueva Ecija's tourist destination. The data indicates that demographic factors such as age, sex, and income do not significantly influence the gastronomy tourist market experience. The study surveyed local and foreign tourists, providing insights into the state of food tourism in Nueva Ecija. Most tourists were interested in food-related activities, recognizing its importance in travel experiences. Locals played a crucial role in assessing this potential.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism; Gastronomy Tourist Market; Food-related Experiences; Nueva Ecija Delicacies; Cultural Tourism; Sustainable Tourism Practices

1. Introduction

Tourism supports the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by making a significant contribution to address economic, climate and poverty imperatives (Rifai, 2010). In a time when travel to new places is becoming more and more popular and people are seeking out unusual dining experiences, food tourism has become an important tool that not only entices travelers' tastes but also provides an insight into a place's cultural background. Nueva Ecija, a hidden gem in Luzon, is known as the "Rice Bowl of the Philippines" due to its rich culinary traditions and diverse flavors. The province's vibrant food scene showcases the harmonious blend of Spanish, indigenous, and modern influences, making it a popular destination for food tourists, focusing on the individuals embarking on this culinary journey. Lack of research on the possible effects of food tourism on the region's total tourism business is one potential research gap in Nueva Ecija's culinary treasures: a tourist-centric examination of food tourism in the province of Nueva Ecija, Philippines. The lack of research on Nueva Ecija's culinary traditions emphasizes the need for further research into the social and economic advantages of food tourism for both the travel industry and nearby communities. Examining the reasons behind and activities of food tourists in Nueva Ecija is essential for sustainable tourism practices and policy development, which in turn affects the local economy and community growth.

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The purpose of this study is to offer a thorough analysis of Nueva Ecija's food tourism from the perspective of the visitors. To learn about their motives, experiences, and how their culinary journeys have affected the local economy and culture by asking them to share their thoughts. By doing this, it aims to clarify the complex relationship that exists between food tourism and Nueva Ecija's overall sustainable tourist development framework. This study aims out to investigate the field of food tourism in Nueva Ecija by exploring the viewpoints of travelers who come to enjoy the region's culinary delights. This research proposes to investigate Nueva Ecija's culinary landscape in order to uncover the province's unrealized culinary potential. The selection of signature dishes—those that accurately capture Nueva Ecija's culinary identity—would be a crucial component of this study. These foods could act as focal points for culinary tourism, enticing travelers to certain eateries, marketplaces, or celebrations. Nueva Ecija can become a distinctive and memorable destination in the Philippine food tourism scene by showcasing these exceptional culinary experiences.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to analyze the reasons of the gastronomic tourism market experiences of visitors in Nueva Ecija province. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- How may the socio-demographic profile of the respondents be described in terms of the following;
 - age
 - sex
 - civil status
 - occupation
 - monthly income/allowance
 - educational attainment or status
 - medium they used to know the local dish in the province
 - tourist destination visited/municipality
 - mode of travel used; and
 - length of stay during vacation?
- What is the respondent's motivation in visiting the tourist destination in terms of;
 - Food; and
 - Culture?
- How may the gastronomy tourist market experience of the respondents be described in terms of;
 - Varieties/choice of dish served;
 - Quality of food served;
 - Value of food served and;
 - Cost, sanitation and safety of food served?
- Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the motivation to visit Nueva Ecija's tourist destination?
- Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and their food perceived market experience in Nueva Ecija?

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by a comprehensive theoretical framework that draws from multiple key concepts in the fields of tourism, cultural studies, and consumer behavior. The foundation of this framework lies in the Gastronomy Tourism Framework, which highlights the importance of gastronomy as a key motivator for travel. This framework could be used to examine how food tourism in Nueva Ecija can be used to attract tourists who are interested in experiencing the province's unique cuisine (McKercher and Choi, 2003).

1.3. Conceptual Framework

The paradigm aims to explain the framework utilized in the duration of this study, and justify the key aspects of the study foundation used to convey and understand the over-all study.

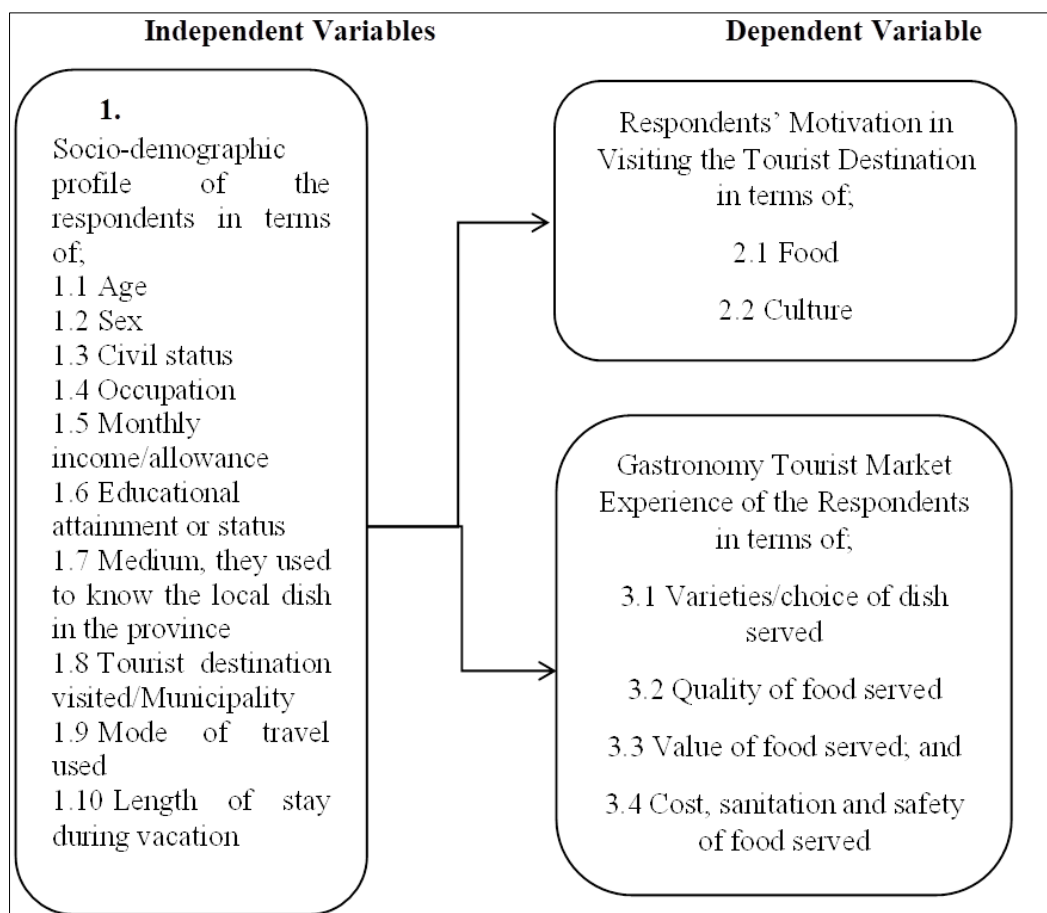


Figure 1 Research Paradigm

1.4. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This research study focused on examining if food tourism in Nueva Ecija contributes to the overall experience of tourists in the said province. The respondents of the study were both local and foreign tourists who visited the identified tourist destinations.

A self-constructed survey questionnaire and Google Form were used as the research instruments to gather information related to the research study. This study was conducted for a limited period of time, from February to October 2023, at Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research Design

The researcher used the descriptive method to conduct this study.

2.2. Research Locale

This study was conducted in the municipality of Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija. This town was chosen because of the beautiful tourist destination in the municipality, and the researcher want to know if the tourists in Gabaldon have seen and tasted different delicacies around the province of Nueva Ecija. It also consists of various attractions and tourism-related activities that are known and visited by both local and foreign tourists, not only for the wonderful sight-seeing attractions but also for the local delicatessen the province offers.



Figure 2 Nueva Ecija Map

2.3. Population

The respondents to this study were selected using non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling.

The respondents of this study were the tourists who have been in the identified municipalities of Nueva Ecija. Researcher used two (2) methods to choose their respondents: first, by approaching the target respondents and asking them if they are tourists in Nueva Ecija; if they are tourists visiting the province, researcher handed out the questionnaire and instructed the respondents to answer all the information needed in the study. The second method used in the study was the Google Form type of questionnaire. The researcher made a questionnaire that was easy to access on the internet, and they sent it to the respondents that they knew had visited the province of Nueva Ecija.

Table 1 Table of Respondents

Municipality	No. of Respondents
Tourists in Nueva Ecija	100

2.4. Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire used by the researcher was developed through an intensive review of the literature. The draft was presented to the researcher’s adviser for further comments and suggestions. An improved and revised questionnaire incorporated all the suggestions that came out after the validations.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

Asking if they are tourists in the province of Nueva Ecija, the researcher approached the chosen individuals and request permission to conduct survey with them. The survey questionnaire was given to the chosen respondents after the tourist gave their consent. The study was conducted both directly and via Google Form by the researchers, who then distributed and send the survey forms. Upon receiving the participants’ responses, the researcher obtained the administered questionnaire. The statistics expert received the data once it had been calculated, totaled, and submitted.

2.6. Research Instrument

To collect information about food tourism in Nueva Ecija, the researcher employed a questionnaire and a Google form. The questionnaire was divided into four primary sections. The first section was asking people if they’re tourist in the province, it was the first element of the questionnaire. The second section included the demographic profile or information of the selected respondents, such as their age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational

attainment or status, social networking site(s) visited, local dish seen, tourist destination visited or municipality, mode of travel used, and length of stay during vacation.

The final section of the questionnaire inquired about the respondent's motive for visiting the tourist location in terms of food and culture. The fourth section determines the respondents' gastronomy tourist market experience in terms of varieties and choices of dishes served, quality of local food served, value of local food served, sanitation and safety of local food served, and cost and hazards of food served.

2.7. Data Analysis

The data gathered was statistically treated by means of descriptive statistics, while Pearson Product Moment correlation was used in linear correlation. It is a number between -1 and 1 that measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables.

2.8. Ethical Consideration

Accountability, trust, mutual respect, and fairness among all stakeholders involved in a study are all required for ethical consideration. The goal of this value is to preserve all contributors' intellectual property rights. Accountability to the general public through the protection of our respondents for use in the study.

As a result, the researchers issued a letter requesting permission to conduct a survey with the respondents. The research facilitator and research adviser signed the request letter. Informing respondents before conducting a survey is part of research ethics. That is why the researchers presented the overall goal of the study and why they were chosen as respondents in order for the respondents to be aware of the survey's basic information.

3. Presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section describes the general background information of the respondents. The table below presents the profile of the respondents, which consists of age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment or status, how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist destination or municipality visited, mode of travel used, and length of stay during vacation. A total of 100 tourist respondents from different municipalities in Nueva Ecija are located to assess the food tourism in Nueva Ecija.

Table 4 Profile of the Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-22	54	54%
23-27	16	16%
28-32	7	7%
33-37	9	9%
38-43	3	3%
44-48	6	6%
49-53	1	1%
55 and above	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Table 4 shows the distribution of the respondents according to age. Based on the data presented, respondents ages 18–22 top the list with 54%, followed by the ages 23–27, which consist of 16%, followed by 33–37 years old, which consist of 9% of the respondents, followed by 28–32 years old with 7%, while 6% belonged to the ages 44–48, followed by 4% of ages 55 and above, and 1% of ages 49–53. According to Joslyn (2022), Baby Boomers are the most likely to travel for

work but appreciate a good vacation. Generational travel preferences vary among Gen X and Gen Z folks. They love to travel, especially when it involves great food.

Table 5 Profile of the Respondents According to Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	59	59%
Female	41	41%
Total	100	100%

Table 5 shows the sex of the respondents. It shows that 41 percent of the respondents were female and 59 percent were male. Sex has been shown to have a significant impact on eating behaviors, food choices, and consumption (Grzymislawska et al., 2020). According to Kivela and Crofts (2005) men are more interested in consuming local food due to their emphasis on taste. Women remain concerned about the safety of food, their weight status, and avoiding meat consumption and high-calorie foods.

Table 6 Profile of the Respondents According to Civil Status

Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	70	70%
Married	27	27%
Widowed	1	1%
Other's	2	2%
Total	100	100

Table 6 shows the civil status of the respondents from Nueva Ecija. It shows that 70 percent were single, 27 percent were married, 1 percent were widowed, and 2 percent had other civil status. Marital status is one of the factors that affect vacation decisions (Kattiyaponrnping and Miller, 2008). According to Lee and Bhargava (2004), married couples spend less time enjoying leisure than single couples. That's why, in this study, 70 percent of the respondents are single because they want to enjoy and try new things in their lives.

Table 7 Profile of the Respondents According to Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	70	70%
Unemployed	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Table 7 shows the occupation status of the respondents. It indicates that most of the respondents were employed (70 percent), while 30 percent were unemployed. According to Donde (2023), employee travel is vacation. It helps employees step out of their comfort zones (and out of the office) to create new memories and expand their horizons. In too many offices, policies or norms stand in the way of these opportunities. Companies need to change how they approach employee travel.

Table 8 Profile of the Respondents According to Monthly Income/Allowance

Monthly Income/Allowance	Frequency	Percentage
5,000-10,000	80	80%
10,000-15,000	9	9%
15,000-25,000	11	11%
Total	100	100%

Table 8 presents the average monthly income or allowance of the respondents. Eighty percent of the respondents have an average monthly income or allowance of 5,000–10,000 pesos. Nine percent of the respondents have an average monthly income or allowance of 10,000–15,000 pesos. Eleven percent of the respondents have an average monthly income or allowance of 15,000–25,000 pesos. The level of income determines the level of consumption and the degree of satisfaction with demand, thus determining the change in consumption structure (Tian, 2002). But in this study, respondents who have a monthly income or allowance of Php 5,000–10,000 were the top respondents, because, as stated in Table 6, ages 18–22 were the top respondents because they didn't hesitate to spend their money on their travel and fulfill their pleasure.

Table 9 Profile of the Respondents According to Educational Attainment or Status

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary Graduate	7	7%
High School Graduate	33	33%
College	57	57%
Post Degree Graduate	3	3%
Other's	0	0%
Total	100	100%

Table 9 shows the educational attainment or status of the respondents. It shows that 3 percent of the respondents were elementary graduates, 33 percent were high school graduates, 57 percent were college graduates, 3 percent of the respondents were post-degree graduates, and 0 for others. Young tourists are seen as individual tourists who are mostly keen to participate in tourism activities for several purposes, such as education and cultural tourism (Du Cros & Jingya, 2013; Boukas, 2013).

Table 10 Mediums of knowing the local dish in the province

Mediums of knowing the local dish in the province	Frequency	Percentage
Social Networking Sites	57	57%
Television	12	12%
Print/Signage	2	2%
From other people	29	29%
Other's	0	0%
Total	100	100%

Table 10 presents how respondents know the local dish served in Nueva Ecija. It shows that 2% of the respondents saw the local dish served in Nueva Ecija from print or signs, followed by 11% seeing it on television, 29% hearing it from other people who visit the province, and 57% seeing it on social media sites. Reilly (2005) defined social media as "a

broad term that describes software tools to create user-generated content that can be shared.” That is why many local dishes have been promoted by the use of social networking sites in the province of Nueva Ecija.

Table 11 Tourist Destination/Municipality Visited

Tourist Destination/ Municipality Visited	Frequency	Percentage
Gabalton	56	56%
Cabanatuan	15	15%
Laur	24	24%
Munoz	3	3%
Bongabon	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Table 11 shows the destination or municipality that the respondents visited on their trip to Nueva Ecija. Out of 100 respondents, 56% have visited the municipality of Gabaldon, 15% have visited the municipality of Cabanatuan City, Laur has been visited by 24% of the respondents, 3% have visited Munoz, and 2% have visited Bongabon.

Table 12 Mode of Travel Used

Mode of Travel Used	Frequency	Percentage
Public Vehicle	72	72%
Private Vehicle	28	28%
Total	100	100%

Table 12 shows the mode of travel used to visit the province of Nueva Ecija. 72% of the respondents used public vehicles to visit the said province, while the other 28% used their private vehicles to visit Nueva Ecija.

Table 13 Length of Stay during your Vacation

Length of Stay during your Vacation	Frequency	Percentage
1 Day	52	52%
2 Days	25	25%
3 Days	21	21%
4 Days	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Table 13 presents the respondents length of stay in Nueva Ecija. One (1) day tops the survey with 52% of the respondents, followed by two (2) days with 25%. Twenty-one percent of them staying at least 3 days in Nueva Ecija, and lastly, 2% of the respondents staying 4 days in the province. Length of stay is therefore a key demand variable that has previously been neglected but merits much greater research attention (Gokovali et.al, 2006).

3.2. Respondent’s Motivation for Visiting the Tourist Destination

This section describes the respondents’ answers about the motivation for their visit to the province of Nueva Ecija. The tables below represent the interpretation of the respondent’s data about the local food, dishes, and exotic foods in the province.

Table 14 Local Food/Dish

	Statements	Weighted mean	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
1.	Aying's Homemade pastillas is the best pastillas in Nueva Ecija.	3.22	6	AGREE
2.	Batutay Longganisa is the best longganisa in Nueva Ecija.	3.41	2	STRONGLY AGREE
3.	Puno's Ice Cream & Sherbet is the best ice cream provider in Nueva Ecija.	3.49	1	STRONGLY AGREE
4.	Kape Ecija is the best coffee products in Nueva Ecija.	3.28	3	STRONGLY AGREE
5.	Balaw – Balaw is the best buro in the Nueva Ecija.	3.09	8	AGREE
6.	PCC Carabao Dairy Products is the best provider of dairy carabao products in Nueva Ecija.	3.16	7	AGREE
7.	Papaitang Kambing sa Alibang-bang is the best soup in Nueva Ecija.	3.27	4	STRONGLY AGREE
8.	Espasol or Baye-Baye is the best dessert in Nueva Ecija	3.26	5	STRONGLY AGREE
9.	San Antonio' Nueva Ecija's kakanin is the best in Nueva Ecija	3.07	9	AGREE
10.	Ariel Sans Rival is the best cake in Nueva Ecija	3.04	10	AGREE
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.23		AGREE

Table 14 presents the local foods and dishes in the province of Nueva Ecija. Based from the data gathered, Puno's Ice Cream & Sherbet is the best ice cream provider in Nueva Ecija as it ranked first among other food and dishes with weighted mean of 3.49. Meanwhile, Ariel Sans Rival is in least rank with weighted mean of 3.04 in which respondents agreed that is the best cake in Nueva Ecija.

Based on Mingoy (2022), the most typical reason why coffee is popular and loved by many Filipinos and remains their go-to drink is that it helps them fuel their day and boost their energy. Overall, according to Hills (2023), drinking coffee in the Philippines is more than just a daily habit; it reflects the country's deep-seated values of community, hospitality, and cultural heritage.

As stated in the study of De Villa et al. (2018), Filipino kakanin are local rice or root crop delicacies included in the daily consumption of Filipinos as snacks in between meals; however, the traditional methods and ingredients utilized with this kakanin are gradually fading away because of modernization. All things considered, as a starting point to look at Filipino rice-based kakanin recipes.

In accordance with Jon (2022), out of all the variants, the *Batutay* is considered the best-seller. It caught the love and attention of people because of its unique sweet and salty flavor. According to Manny (2015), *papaitan kambing* (or bitter goat stew or goat innard stew) is a popular Ilocano dish composed of goat's innards, such as the ad tripe, lungs, intestines, kidneys, and, of course, the bile. The bile is used to make the stew bitter, but the authentic Ilocano *papaitan* uses green enzymes from the small intestines. But if you don't want to use the enzyme, you can use bile instead.

According to Atlas (2023), Espasol is a soft, chewy Filipino rice cake prepared with a combination of toasted glutinous rice flour and grated green coconut that is slowly cooked in coconut milk. The mixture turns into a soft, pliable dough that is shaped into long cylinders or triangles before each cake is coated in rice flour.

Table 15 Exotic Food in Nueva Ecija

	Statement	Weighted Mean	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
1.	Adobong Salagubang known as alagaw in Tagalog while in Nueva Ecija in which I already tasted.	2.54	5	Agree
2.	Pritong Tateg is common exotic dish that I already tasted.	1.7	8	Strongly disagree
3.	Pritong Susuhong/ Arawan it is common exotic dish that I already tasted.	2.79	4	Agree
4.	Adobong Palaka is very delicious dish in Nueva Ecija.	3.17	2	Agree
5.	Inihaw na Day-old is also well-known dish I tasted in Nueva Ecija.	3.07	3	Agree
6.	Tokneneng/Kwek-Kwek is a street food that consists of hard-boiled quail eggs and flour.	3.5	1	Strongly agree
7.	Adobong Ahas is a dish that is common to Novo Ecijano.	1.8	7	Disagree
8.	Adobong Kwebang Paniki is also a common dish in Nueva Ecija.	1.49	10	Strongly disagree
9.	Adobo sa Gatang Bayawak is also a well-known exotic dish in Nueva Ecija	1.92	6	Disagree
10.	Ginisang Antik (Hantik) is also a common exotic dish in Nueva Ecija.	1.54	9	Stongly disagree
	Overall Weighted Mean	2.35	AGREE	

Table 15 presents the exotic foods in Nueva Ecija. In this table, the highest in ranking is the *tokneneng*, or *kwek-kwek*, is a street food that consists of hard-boiled quail eggs and flour with weighted mean of 3.5 with the verbal interpretation of strongly agree. *Kwek-kwek* is made of quail eggs coated with an orange batter and deep-fried to golden perfection. This popular Filipino street food is fun to eat and delicious with spicy vinegar or a special dipping sauce. Meanwhile, the least exotic food in the province of Nueva Ecija is the *Adobong Kwebang Paniki* with weighted mean of 1.49 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Disagree.

3.3. Gastronomy Tourist Market Experience of The Respondents

This section describes the respondents' answers about the gastronomy and tourist experiences of the respondents in the province of Nueva Ecija. The tables below present the interpretation of the respondent's data about the varieties and choices of local food served, the quality of local food served, the value of local food served, and the cost, sanitation, and safety of local food served.

Table 16 Varieties/Choices of Local Foods Serves

	Statements	Weighted Mean	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1.	There were enough choices of food establishment in the province.	3.26	1	Highly satisfied
2.	There were varieties of food served in the food establishment.	3.18	4	Satisfied
3.	The products are well promoted in different social media platforms.	3.25	2	Highly satisfied
4.	The food products are well promoted in prints.	2.97	5	Satisfied
5.	The food establishment present menu of food selection.	3.19	3	Satisfied
	Overall weighted Mean	3.17	Satisfied	

The table above shows the varieties and choices of local foods served. The results show that there were enough choices of food establishments in the province with a total weighted mean of 3.26 with a verbal interpretation of highly satisfied.

Meanwhile, least rank shows that the food products are well promoted in prints and has a total weighted mean of 2.97 and verbal interpretation of is satisfied.

According to Taylor & Francis (2017), by creating and promoting a unique branded destination, a successful marketer can attract new visitors to their city or tourism attraction. With the rise of social media, there is even more scope to explore how tourism marketers can use their own and other social media sites to communicate with today’s tech-connected travelers. In a new updated volume, *Tourism Marketing for Cities and Towns* provides thorough and succinct information.

Table 17 Quality of Local Food Served

	Statement	Weighted Mean	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1.	Food served is delicious and tasty.	3.32	1	Highly satisfied
2.	Food served is in a tidy plating.	3.07	8	Satisfied
3.	Flavor of the food served fill your craving.	3.27	2	Highly satisfied
4.	Aroma of the food is appropriate and perfect with the food served.	3.23	5	Satisfied
5.	Food is served in acceptable serving size.	3.24	4	Satisfied
6.	The appearance of the food served is tempting.	3.16	6	Satisfied
7.	The quality of food served is unique.	3.12	7	Satisfied
8.	Service is prompt and of quality.	3.25	3	Highly satisfied
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.21		Satisfied

This table presented the quality of local food served in Nueva Ecija. Respondents are highly satisfied in the food served as delicious and tasty with a total weighted mean of 3.32. Meanwhile, lowest weighted mean is 3.07 which states that the food served is in a tidy plating. Taste preferences and subsequent food choices can be changed by repeated exposure, especially during childhood, during which taste preferences play a major role in food choice and consumption (Liem and Russell, 2019). Food craving refers to an intense desire to consume a specific food. In Western societies, these foods usually have high palatability and are energy dense; that is, they have a high sugar and/or fat content (Meule, 2015). Seth, Deshmukh, and Vrat (2005) defined service quality as the ability for service providers to match expected service with perceived service to achieve customer satisfaction.

Table 18 Value of Local Food Served

	Statement	Weighted mean	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1.	Food served has fresh herbs and spices to add flavor to the food.	3.17	3	Satisfied
2.	Ingredients use in your food is fresh.	3.19	2	Satisfied
3.	Food served is easy to digest.	2.99	4	Satisfied
4.	Food served with fruits and vegetable.	3.3	1	Highly Satisfied
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.16		Satisfied

This table presents the value of the local food served in Nueva Ecija. This table indicates the overall rating of the respondent in terms of the value of local food. Result shows that the food served with fruits and vegetables has the highest weighted mean of 3.3 with a verbal interpretation of highly satisfied. Meanwhile, the least rank has a weighted mean of 2.99 in which respondents stated that the food served is easy to digest. A fruit is defined as the edible part of a plant that consists of the seeds and surrounding tissues, while vegetables are plants cultivated for their edible parts. Fruits and vegetables are important sources of micro nutrients and dietary fibers and are components of a healthy diet, which help in preventing major diseases.

Table 19 Cost, Sanitation and Safety of Local Food Served

	Statements	Weighted Mean	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1.	Rate your satisfaction with the quality of the food served in terms of freshness and hygiene.	3.20	6	Satisfied
2.	Rate your level of satisfaction in the cleanliness of utensils.	3.23	4	Satisfied
3.	Rate your level of satisfaction with the location's accessibility.	3.22	5	Satisfied
4.	Rate your level of satisfaction with the comfort rooms in restaurants or eatery.	3.06	10	Satisfied
5.	Rate your level of satisfaction with the cleanliness of the facility.	3.11	9	Satisfied
6.	Rate your level of satisfaction in the security of the place.	2.99	11	Satisfied
7.	The price of food is appropriate with the serving.	3.14	8	Satisfied
8.	The food served possesses unacceptable objects like hair, flies, plastic wrapper, and like.	2.00	14	Dissatisfied
9.	The food served is not what you ordered.	2.05	13	Dissatisfied
10.	The food served is clean.	3.31	1	Highly satisfied
11.	The price is expensive but the serving is small.	2.22	12	Dissatisfied
12.	The price of the food is budget friendly.	3.15	7	Satisfied
13.	The food is well cooked.	3.25	2	Highly satisfied
14.	The food served is perfect and clean.	3.24	3	Satisfied
	Overall weighted mean	2.94		Satisfied

This table presents the value of the cost, sanitation, and safety of the food served in Nueva Ecija. The table shows that the food served is clean with a weighted mean of 3.31 and a verbal interpretation of highly satisfied. Meanwhile, the lowest rank is indicating that the food served possess unacceptable objects like hair, flies, plastic wrapper, and like with 2.00 weighted mean, and dissatisfied as verbal interpretation. Overall, respondents are satisfied with the cost, sanitation, and safety of local food served in the province of Nueva Ecija.

Relationship of the profile of the respondents and the motivation to visit Nueva Ecija's tourist destination

This section describes the relationship of the respondent's profile and the motivation to visit Nueva Ecija's tourist destination.

Table 20 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Motivation in Visiting the Tourist Destination in terms of Local Food/Dish

Respondents	Motivation Local Food/Dish in Nueva Ecija		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	-0.093	0.335	100
Sex	0.007	0.946	100
Civil Status	-0.003	0.980	100
Occupation	0.23	0.822	100
Monthly Income	-0.019	0.852	100
Educational Attainment	0.118	0.244	100
Local Dish Served	-0.058	0.564	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	-.020	0.844	100
Mode of Travel Used	0.005	0.959	100
Stay During the Vacation	-0.098	0.331	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 20 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondents: age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment, medium of knowing the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation and local food or dish.

In this table, it shows the demographic profile of the respondents, which is age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment, medium of knowing the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation have no significant relationship with the motivation in visiting tourist destination in terms of local food or dish.

Table 21 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Motivation in visiting the tourist Destination in terms of Exotic Food in Nueva Ecija

Respondents	Motivation Exotic Food in Nueva Ecija		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	-0.018	0.862	100
Sex	0.011	0.912	100
Civil Status	0.047	0.642	100
Occupation	0.023	0.820	100
Monthly Income	-0.002	0.986	100
Educational Attainment	-0.005	0.959	100
Local Dish Served	-0.003	0.980	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	0.012	0.908	100
Mode of Travel Used	-0.068	0.510	100
Stay During the Vacation	-0.147	0.146	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 21 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondents: age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment, how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, stay during the vacation, and exotic food in Nueva Ecija. This table shows the demographic profile of the respondents, which are age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment, local dish served, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation have no significant relationship with the motivation of tourists in exotic food in Nueva Ecija. Relationship of the profile of the respondents and their gastronomy tourist market experience in Nueva Ecija. This section describes the relationship of the respondent's profile and their gastronomy tourist market experience in Nueva Ecija.

Table 22 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Varieties/Choices of Local Food Served

Respondents	Experience Varieties/Choices of Local Food Served		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	-0.012	0.908	100
Sex	0.051	0.618	100
Civil Status	-0.077	0.446	100
Occupation	0.027	0.793	100
Monthly Income	-0.013	0.899	100
Educational Attainment	0.063	0.532	100
Local Dish Served	0.124	0.220	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	0.065	0.522	100
Mode of Travel Used	0.035	0.729	100
Stay During the Vacation	0.009	0.930	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 22 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondents: age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment, how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation, and varieties or choices of local food served. This result shows the demographic profile of the respondents has no significant relationship between the varieties or choices of local food served.

Table 23 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Quality of Local Food Served

Respondents	Experience Quality of Local Food Served		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	0.095	0.346	100
Sex	0.002	0.984	100
Civil Status	0.049	0.627	100
Occupation	0.121	0.230	100
Monthly Income	-0.012	0.904	100
Educational Attainment	0.097	0.338	100
Local Dish Served	0.178	0.077	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	-0.017	0.864	100
Mode of Travel Used	-0.023	0.822	100
Stay During the Vacation	-0.046	0.651	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 23 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondents (age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, educational attainment), how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation, and the quality of local food served. The demographic profile of the respondents do not have a significant relationship with the quality of local food served.

Table 24 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Value of Local Food Served

Respondents	Experience Value of Local Food Served		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	0.098	0.331	100
Sex	-0.040	0.692	100
Civil Status	0.040	0.693	100
Occupation	0.088	0.382	100
Monthly Income	-0.073	0.472	100
Educational Attainment	0.082	0.417	100
Local Dish Served	0.172	0.087	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	0.095	0.346	100
Mode of Travel Used	0.028	0.784	100
Stay During the Vacation	-0.076	0.452	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 24 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondents, age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, education attainment, how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation, and the value of the food served. The results show the demographic profile of the respondents, which is age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, education attainment, how did they know the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation do not have significant relationship with the value of food served.

Table 25 Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the Respondents and Cost, Sanitation and Safety of Local Food Served

Respondents	Experience Sanitation and Safety of Local Food Served		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Age	-0.056	0.581	100
Sex	-0.195	0.052	100
Civil Status	-0.022	0.280	100
Occupation	-0.097	0.339	100
Monthly Income	-0.176	0.079	100
Educational Attainment	-0.033	0.747	100
Local Dish Served	-0.026	0.794	100
Tourist Municipality Visited	-0.139	0.167	100
Mode of Travel Used	0.071	0.483	100
Stay During the Vacation	-0.126	0.212	100

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 25 shows the correlation between the demographic profile of the respondent, age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, education attainment, how they knew the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation, and sanitation and safety of food. The result shows the demographic profile of the respondent, which is age, sex, civil status, occupation, monthly income, education attainment, how did they know the local dish in the province, tourist municipality visited, mode of travel used, and stay during the vacation do not have a significant relationship between the value of sanitation and the safety of food

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations and experiences of food tourists in Nueva Ecija. The findings suggest that the province's culinary offerings play a significant role in attracting tourists, with traditional dishes and cultural experiences being key motivators. The high level of satisfaction reported by respondents highlights the potential of food tourism to enhance Nueva Ecija's tourism industry. To capitalize on this potential, stakeholders should focus on promoting the province's unique culinary heritage, improving food-related infrastructure, and implementing sustainable tourism practices.

Furthermore, the assessment also identifies the need for appropriate marketing strategies to promote exotic food tourism in Nueva Ecija successfully. Targeted marketing initiatives through various channels, such as social media, food blogs, and travel websites, can help raise awareness and attract tourists interested in trying out exotic food experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Promote Culinary Heritage:** Develop marketing campaigns that highlight Nueva Ecija's unique culinary traditions and promote the province as a premier food tourism destination.
- **Enhance Food-Related Infrastructure:** Invest in improving food-related infrastructure, including food markets, dining establishments, and transportation facilities, to enhance the overall tourist experience.
- **Support Local Food Establishments:** Provide support and training to local food establishments to ensure high standards of quality, sanitation, and safety.
- **Develop Culinary Tours and Festivals:** Organize culinary tours and food festivals that showcase Nueva Ecija's diverse food offerings and provide tourists with immersive culinary experiences.
- **Implement Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Encourage sustainable tourism practices that benefit both tourists and the local community, promoting economic growth and cultural preservation

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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