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[TUGRUL GUNAY](#)\*, [RUKIYE KILILI](#)\*, [MUSTAFA SAH](#)

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*Article*

# Tourist Intentions to Recommend Towards Gastronomy Destination: The case of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus

Tugrul Gunay <sup>1,\*</sup>, Rukiye Kilili <sup>2</sup> and Mustafa Sah <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Tourism, Cyprus Science University, Kyrenia 99320, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Tourism, Cyprus Science University, Kyrenia 99320, Turkey

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Tourism, Cyprus Science University, Kyrenia 99320, Turkey

\* Correspondence: Correspondence: tugrugunay@csu.edu.tr

**Abstract:** This study endeavors to elucidate the intricate interplay between gastronomic involvement, gastronomic knowledge, past gastronomic experiences, gastronomic attractiveness, destination attractiveness, tourist satisfaction, and the intention to revisit. In the context of this investigation, the research population comprises 300 international culinary tourists who have ventured to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Employing SPSS software, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to rigorously assess construct validity, reliability, and the discriminant and convergent validity of the research model. The findings of this research study underscore the positive relationships that exist between various dimensions of gastronomy, namely involvement in gastronomy, knowledge of gastronomy, and previous gastronomic experiences, and the perceived attractiveness of gastronomy. These findings enhance our understanding of how culinary elements affect tourists' perceptions and experiences, highlighting the crucial role of gastronomy in destination appeal and visitor satisfaction. This research is a significant step towards enhancing our comprehension of the dynamic nexus between gastronomy and the tourism industry, ultimately benefiting destination management and strategy development.

**Keywords:** Gastronomic involvement; knowledge; past gastronomic effects; gastronomic attractiveness; destination attractiveness; satisfaction; intention to re-visit.

## 1. Introduction

Culinary tourism, also widely recognized as food tourism, represents an evolving and increasingly significant segment of the global travel industry, capturing the interest of destination managers, academics, and marketing professionals. As a vital element of the tourist experience, gastronomy wields considerable influence over travelers' decision-making processes and their perception of destinations [1,2]. The allure of distinctive culinary experiences draws tourists to explore new destinations, driven by the desire to engage with local cuisines that serve as gateways to understanding community identity, culture, and traditions [3,4]. Gastronomy, thus, functions not only as a component of sensory exploration but also as a medium of symbolic communication, revealing insights into a community's values and way of life [5,6]. Among others, the United Nations World Tourism Organization [7] recognizes that gastronomy tourism constitutes a core driver of the attractiveness and competitiveness of travel destinations. Such an emerging interest in food experiences reflects shifting tastes among tourists – who increasingly look for absorbing and novel cultural experiences away from standard tourism offerings [8,9]. Inasmuch as gastronomic experiences contribute to the overall tourism experience, systematic research has not been conducted as to how culinary preferences and experiences influence tourist behavior and destination choices. Differences in understanding gastronomy also point to the complexities associated with such emotional attachments and hence their limited impact on tourist behaviour [10,11]. Although national cuisines can attract culinary tourists, several limitations can affect their success in travel

promotion. One major issue is the risk of cultural misrepresentation. National cuisines are typically rich and varied, with distinct regional and historical influences. Simplifying these cuisines to appeal to tourists can strip away their authenticity, potentially leading to dissatisfaction among those seeking genuine culinary experiences [12]. Another challenge is the seasonal availability of certain ingredients. Many traditional dishes depend on fresh, locally sourced ingredients that may not be accessible year-round, impacting the quality and consistency of the culinary experiences offered [13]. Additionally, certain traditional foods are linked to specific cultural or religious festivals, making them unavailable at other times, which could disappoint tourists visiting outside these periods [14]. Health and safety concerns also arise, as tourists may not be familiar with local food preparation practices, potentially leading to food safety issues [3]. Furthermore, promoting national cuisines must consider the diverse dietary restrictions and preferences of international tourists, which may not always align with traditional dishes [15]. Addressing these limitations requires a thoughtful approach that balances authenticity with tourist expectations and needs. The present study tries to overcome this limitation by examining the direct and/or moderated relationships among gastronomic involvement and knowledge, past experiences, and their joint impact on perceived gastronomic and destination attractiveness, and hence on tourist satisfaction and willingness to recommend. More specifically, the present research focuses on Northern Cyprus and the motivations of culinary tourists and the implications that these have for destination marketing strategies. As shown above, recent research has highlighted the many and varied aspects of culinary tourism. Bessiere and Tibere [16] examined how local food contributes to the narratives of home and away, while Kim, Eves, and Scarles [17] investigated how sensory food experiences increase travelers' destination loyalty. Such research underscores destination needs for exploiting their differential culinary endowments primarily to enhance the experience and satisfaction of their tourists [18].

The current research has three main objectives: The first is to outline the relationships between gastronomic factors and destination appeal. The second is to analyze how gastronomic appeal influences tourist satisfaction and recommendation intentions. The third is to provide insights for attracting culinary tourists to Northern Cyprus.

No study has been found in the existing literature that elucidates the intricate interplay between gastronomic involvement, gastronomic knowledge, past gastronomic experiences, gastronomic attractiveness, destination attractiveness, tourist satisfaction, and the intention to revisit, encompassing all these variables together. In this regard, it is believed that this research will make a significant contribution to the mainstream literature.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Gastronomy Involvement Gastronomy Attractiveness and Destination Attractiveness*

Consumer behavior helps in understanding processes through which decisions are made concerning products, brands, and services. In this context, involvement, particularly with gastronomy, is associated with the degree to which people are willing to get involved, their experiences, and their likes [19,20]. Gastronomy involvement is conceived as the subjective personal relevance and importance perceived by an individual in at least some dimensions between food and culinary experiences that account for or shape the predisposition and styles of individual life in the daily decisions and behavior [21].

The tourism destinations are realizing the power of gastronomy in this competitive scenario as a unique selling proposition to drive and retain. Studies have revealed a positive relationship between the level of satisfaction shown by tourists with culinary experiences and their intention to revisit a destination. Here the service elements, such as food quality, the efficiency of the service delivery, and other types of service, including parking, play a very important role in enhancing the tourism value proposition [22].

The global tourism space is increasingly witnessing demand for the authentic local gastronomy experiences that represent the cultural and gastronomic landscape of various destinations. Unique and indigenous cuisines have the power of turning local food to attractive tourism products, which

then augments the appeal of the destination for tourists [23,24]. This reflects the trend of changing consumer preference to experiences, which translates into deep understanding of local culture and lifestyle; almost mediated using gastronomy.

Tourist gastronomic involvement (GI) refers to the degree to which individuals engage with and value culinary experiences during their travels. High levels of GI indicate that tourists are more willing to invest time and effort into experiencing the local food culture, which, in turn, enhances their appreciation and enjoyment of these culinary experiences. Research indicates that tourists who are highly involved in gastronomic activities tend to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local cuisine, leading to a heightened perception of its attractiveness. This positive relationship suggests that as tourists become more engaged with the local food scene, they are more likely to view the destination's gastronomy as a key attractive feature [25,26].

Perceived destination attractiveness (DA) refers to the overall appeal of a destination, encompassing various attributes such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, and culinary offerings. Gastronomy is a crucial component of the destination's appeal, and tourists' involvement in gastronomic activities can significantly influence their overall perception of the destination. Studies have shown that tourist gastronomic involvement (GI) positively impacts DA by enhancing tourists' experiences and satisfaction with the destination's culinary offerings. When tourists actively engage in and enjoy the local gastronomy, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the destination [27,28].

This involvement creates memorable and meaningful experiences that contribute to a positive overall impression of the destination. The quality and uniqueness of the local food, coupled with the enjoyment derived from culinary experiences, can significantly enhance the destination's attractiveness. As such, destinations that effectively promote and leverage their culinary heritage can increase their overall appeal to tourists [1,15]. Thus, we consider the following hypotheses:

**H1a:** Tourist gastronomic involvement (GI) is positively associated with perceived gastronomy attractiveness (GA).

**H1b:** Tourist gastronomic involvement (GI) is positively associated with perceived destination attractiveness (DA).

### 2.2.1. Destination Attractiveness and Gastronomy Knowledge

The dissemination of tourism information is vital in shaping tourists' perceptions and choices, divided into formal sources like marketing materials and informal sources like word-of-mouth and online content [29]. Local gastronomy significantly impacts destination information, influencing tourists' expectations and interest in culinary exploration [30]. Understanding a destination's culinary offerings enhances the travel experience and satisfaction [26], contributing to a deeper cultural appreciation [10]. Studies show that gastronomic knowledge increases the attractiveness of both culinary experiences and the destination [31,32]. Leveraging this knowledge strategically can enhance tourist engagement and satisfaction [33]. Tourists Knowledge of Gastronomy (GK): Measured by familiarity with local dishes, ingredients, and cooking methods. Perceived Destination Attractiveness (DA): Assessed through a composite evaluation of the destination's natural beauty, cultural attractions, infrastructure, and the quality of gastronomic experiences.

Given gastronomy's importance in tourism, it's essential to explore how gastronomic involvement impacts perceptions of gastronomic and destination attractiveness. This research suggests that greater gastronomic involvement positively influences these perceptions, contributing to a fulfilling travel experience.

In this context, two hypotheses are posited to examine the relationship between gastronomic knowledge and its impact on destination appeal:

**H2a:** Tourists' knowledge of gastronomy (GK) is positively associated with their perceived gastronomy attractiveness (GA).

**H2b:** Tourists' knowledge of gastronomy (GK) is positively associated with their perceived destination attractiveness (DA).



### 2.2.2. Past Gastronomy Experience Gastronomy and Destination Attractiveness

The basic pattern between a tourist's relationship with specific activities and the ensuing perceptions and behaviors is an essential element of tourism studies. Trauer [34] argues the relationship of a "love system" explains that a particular activity or element of destination is subject to a tourist's love when a combination of involvement, knowledge, and prior experiences has been accrued. This model can be easily transferable to gastronomy tourism because the tourists' engagement and their ensuing experiences with the local cuisine deliver signals upon which to base a positive predilection toward the destination's gastronomic attractiveness.

A final spate understanding the role of prior gastronomic experiences has more specifically been defined on the destination perception of a tourist. A tourist's prior experiences not only enhance their knowledge but contribute to a deeper relationship with the destination, and that relationship is held to be more attractive from the tourists' perceptions about the destination [25,35]. Such experiences further consolidate a positive cyclical relationship—a model in which enriched gastronomic knowledge and positive prior experiences increase a tourist's satisfaction with the destination's offerings. Previous Gastronomic Experiences (PGE): Assessed based on the frequency and type of gastronomic activities previously undertaken and the satisfaction derived from those experiences.

National literature extensively investigates the key elements of customers' gastronomic experiences, such as the quality of the physical environment, food, and service [36–43]. Furthermore, the connection between gastronomic experiences and factors like loyalty, satisfaction, gastronomic appeal, gastronomic image, and revisit intentions is also widely studied [44–49].

In this vein, the study proposes two hypotheses to explore the influence of previous gastronomic experiences on perceptions of gastronomy and destination attractiveness:

**H3a:** A tourist's previous gastronomic experiences (PGE) are positively associated with their perceived gastronomy attractiveness (GA).

**H3b:** A tourist's previous gastronomic experiences (PGE) are positively associated with their perceived destination attractiveness (DA).

### 2.2.3. Gastronomy Attractiveness and Destination Attractiveness

A traveler's perceptions and feelings about a destination's ability to meet their vacation desires form the concept known as destination attractiveness. This construct encompasses expectations, preferences, and evaluations regarding the destination's capacity to provide a fulfilling holiday experience [50]. Related to this is destination competitiveness, which reflects a destination's ability to offer superior products and experiences compared to others [51].

Scholarly discussions on destination attractiveness typically fall into three main frameworks. The first framework uses a broad perspective to define competitiveness through general characteristics and dynamic factors [52]. The second framework adopts a resource-based view, focusing on inherent assets and capabilities [53]. The third situational approach identifies specific attributes relevant to different research contexts [54].

The importance of destination attractiveness has been emphasized in various studies for its role in attracting tourists, balancing tourism supply and demand, and aiding strategic tourism planning [53–55]. The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) further underscores this concept by offering a comparative analysis of global destination performance [56].

Gastronomy also plays a significant role in enhancing destination attractiveness. As Brillat-Savarin [57] suggested, the enjoyment of gastronomy goes beyond sensory pleasure, engaging individuals in a cultural narrative that reflects a civilization's customs and uniqueness [58]. Thus, the connection between gastronomy and destination attractiveness is deeply rooted in cultural expression and experience.

Considering this, the following hypothesis is proposed to explore the relationship between gastronomy attractiveness and destination attractiveness:

**H4:** The perceived attractiveness of gastronomy (GA) is positively associated with the perceived attractiveness of the destination (DA).

#### 2.2.4. Gastronomy Attractiveness Destination Attractiveness and Satisfaction

The satisfaction gap concept highlights the difference between consumers' expectations before a purchase and their actual experiences afterward, acting as an indicator of how satisfied they are with products and services [59]. The assessment of customer satisfaction involves a thorough analysis of perceptions and experiences, providing valuable insights into the quality and appeal of offerings [60]. In the tourism sector, gastronomy is increasingly recognized not merely as a supplementary experience but as a core element contributing significantly to overall tourist satisfaction [61].

Chen and Huang [62] assert that the impact of gastronomy on creating memorable tourist experiences should not be underestimated, echoing the sentiment that novelty in culinary experiences often piques human interest and can serve as a potent motivator for travel [63]. Meler and Cerovic [64] note that travelers often seek unique and unexpected culinary experiences that differ from their usual diets. Discovering new cuisines can enhance the perceived attractiveness of a destination and create a sense of engagement and attachment [65]. Local cuisine, an essential element of the tourism experience, significantly influences tourist satisfaction [66]. This indicates that both the allure of gastronomy and the overall appeal of a destination are crucial in shaping tourists' satisfaction levels.

In view of the above, this study posits two hypotheses to examine the direct influence of perceived gastronomy attractiveness (GA) and destination attractiveness (DA) on tourist satisfaction (TS):

**H5:** Perceived gastronomy attractiveness (GA) is positively associated with tourist satisfaction (TS).

**H6:** Perceived destination attractiveness (DA) is positively associated with tourist satisfaction (TS).

#### 2.2.5. Satisfaction and Intention to Re-Visit

Tourist satisfaction, a critical predictor of traveler loyalty, is often gauged by post-trip behaviors such as the intention to revisit or recommend a destination. Existing research underlines that satisfaction plays a significant role in influencing a tourist's likelihood to engage in positive word-of-mouth and to consider revisiting a destination, thereby bolstering its reputation [67].

Customer satisfaction is widely acknowledged to foster repeat patronage and amplify word-of-mouth referrals, crucial drivers for a destination's sustained success [68]. While Bigné et al. [69] could not establish a direct causal relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention, they did note a positive correlation between satisfaction and the propensity to recommend a destination. Hui, Wan, and Ho [70] provided an insight that tourists satisfied with their overall journey are more likely to recommend the destination rather than revisit, perhaps due to the inherent desire for novel experiences. This highlights that satisfaction may not invariably result in repeat visitation but can significantly impact referral intentions [71,72]. Tourist Satisfaction (TS): Represented by overall contentment with experiences at the destination, including accommodation, activities, and culinary experiences.

Tourists with positive gastronomic experiences are more inclined to revisit the same destination in the future [73–77]. Additionally, tourist satisfaction positively influences their likelihood of recommending the destination to others [75,78,79], generating a beneficial domino effect for the destination's gastronomic tourism. The success in achieving tourist satisfaction in gastronomy tourism not only encourages plans for future visits but also prompts tourists to recommend the destination to others. Sutiadiningsih et.al.[80], supports this finding, demonstrating that satisfied tourists are more likely to plan return visits and recommend gastronomy tourism destinations to others.

Loyalty, or the propensity to return, remains a cornerstone of the service industry, with a clear understanding of consumer behavior motives being imperative for tourism managers aiming to build a positive brand image and enhance marketing efforts [81]. Tourists' intentions to return or recommend are influenced by their previous experiences, with satisfaction from past visits being a salient indicator [82].

The interplay of satisfaction with behavioral intentions, such as recommending and revisiting, is fundamental to tourism management. Word-of-mouth referrals, considered one of the most trustworthy and efficient marketing tools, rely on the credibility granted by personal endorsements from fellow travelers, friends, and family [83]. As such, tourist satisfaction is a pivotal factor in shaping these influential behaviors.

Considering the discussions, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H7:** Tourist satisfaction (TS) positively influences their intention to revisit (REI).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Attitude Theory

Attitude theory has been essential in understanding consumer behavior, especially in tourism, where attitudes significantly influence travel decisions. Based on mid-20th-century expectancy-value models, it posits that individuals form attitudes from their beliefs about behavior outcomes and their valuations of these outcomes [84]. This theory explains how subjective probabilities and evaluations shape attitudes, assessed indirectly through beliefs and outcomes.

Recent studies in tourism explore how attitudes influence behaviors, such as revisiting or recommending destinations. While indirect measures offer insights into cognitive processes, direct measures more effectively predict behaviors [84]. The immediacy principle asserts that direct measures, closely linked to behavioral intentions and actions, are stronger predictors of outcomes [85]. Understanding attitudes’ direct impact is crucial for destination marketers. Allport [86] highlighted that attitude, shaped by experience, direct actions toward stimuli.

In today’s context, attitudes toward tourism destinations are shaped by past experiences, perceived value, and emotional connections, leading to recommendations or revisits [87].

The proposed model demonstrating the hypothesized relationships is presented in Figure 1.

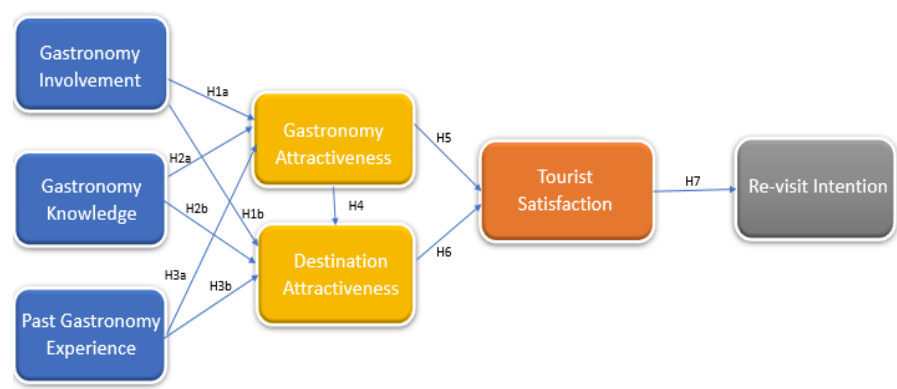


Figure 1. Study Model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Collection of Data

Data were gathered from surveys conducted with 326 respondents between January 5, 2022, and April 22, 2022. After excluding incomplete responses, 300 valid surveys were used in this study. The survey included two sections: one for the main research variables and the other for demographic data and destination experiences.

Proper identification of the population is critical in scientific research since it determines the research criteria for the validity of the entire document. In this regard, the population was the 300 international tourists visiting the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). At the same time, a

sample was drawn using the non-probability random sampling technique wherein the sample was selected by chance without using any predetermined methods and, at the same time, the population is not pre-defined. The survey was based on a 5-point Likert scale, wherein the responses ranged from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (5) “Strongly Agree.” At the same time, 15 questions were included in the survey to capture the demographic characteristics and destination experiences of the respondents.

The questionnaire was served in English and Turkish. While adapting scales from another language, it is imperative that the translations should be in parallel with the language and culture of the sample group. The questionnaire was developed through a rigorous process, including item selection, translation by bilingual academics, back-translation for accuracy, and pre-testing. Constructs were measured using items adapted from previously published studies.

3.2. Data Analysis Methods

Analysis SPSS was employed to analyze the collected data. The first step taken was to determine the frequency of identification to obtain the demographic characteristics of the participants. Convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs was determined by use of CFA in relation to what Anderson and Gerbing [88] proposed. The inter-construct relationships in the research model analyzed through CFA were done by using Pearson’s correlation analysis. CFA was also adopted to contribute to determining the construct validity in terms of reliability and the discriminant and convergent validity of the research model. This was because the measurement levels concept of Fornell and Larcker [89] were used to do this. The estimates provided were taken based on the IFI and the normalized chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) from specified standards to determine the goodness-of-fit of the model.

3.3. Measurement

Several constructs were measured using items; the items were sourced from previously published empirical studies. Gastronomy Involvement (GI) was assessed using an 8-item scale adapted from Bell and Marshall [90]. Gastronomy Knowledge-related attributes were measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Guan and Jones [91]. Past Gastronomy Experience (PGE) was measured using a 4-item scale adapted from Kivela and Crofts [26]. Gastronomy Attractiveness (GA) was evaluated using a 16-item scale adapted from Hu and Ritchie [50]. Tourist Satisfaction (TS) was assessed using a 4-item scale adapted from Meng and Han [92]. Revisit Intention (REI) was measured using a 3-item scale adapted from Han, Hsu, and Lee [93].

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. The data shows that the participants were primarily female (29.0%), single (49.7%), high school graduates (0.7%), between the ages of 18 and 25 (34.7%), making between 1000 and 2500 USD per month and working in the private sector (32.8 %).

Table 1. Demographics Characteristics of Sample.

Gender	n	%	Marital status	n	%
Female	87	29.0	Single	149	49.7
Male	213	71.0	Married	151	50.3
Total	300	100	Total	300	100

Education	n	%	Age	n	%
Middle school and under	4	1.3	18-25	104	34.7



High school	2	0.7	26-35	122	40.7	
Undergraduate	168	56	36-45	51	17.0	
Graduate	126	42	46 and 55	23	7.7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Income Level</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
1.000	\$- 2.500 \$	34	11.3	Private sector	99	33
2.500	\$- 5.000 \$	176	58.7	Public sector	24	8.0
5.000	\$- 7.000 \$	53	17.7	Self-employed	26	8.7
7.000	\$- 9.00 \$	35	11.7	Student	23	7.7
9.000 \$	+	2	0.7	Housewife	33	11.0
				Retired	95	31.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

The sample represented the demographics of tourists in Northern Cyprus. In the study, the majority of participants are in the “2,500 \$- 5,000 \$” income level bracket (58.7%) and the “26-35” age group (40.7%).

4.2. Measure Reliability and Validity

In this research, the reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Refinements to the model were made, leading to the achievement of satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices. The outcomes of the factor analysis are presented in Table 2, which delineates the dimensions, items, factor loadings, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 2. Results of Mearement Properties.

Variable	Measurement Item	Standardized Load)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)
Involvement (I)			.552	.879	.856
	I1	.745			
	I2	.786			
	I3	.789			
	I4	.765			
	I5	.794			
	I6	.762			
	I7	.751			
	I8	.675			
Knowledge (K)		.814	.814	.862	.846
	K1	.843			
	K2	.821			
	K3	.869			
	K4	.864			
	K5	.893			
Past Experience (PE)		.549	.549	.631	.632
	P1	.965			
	P2	.546			
	P3	.652			
	P4	.843			

Gastronomy Attractiveness (GA)			.653	.742	.753
	GA1	.632			
	GA2	.743			
	GA3	.736			
	GA4	.653			
	GA5	.724			
	GA6	.753			
	GA7	.684			
	GA8	.729			
	GA9	.638			
Variable	Measurement Item	Standardized Load)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Destination Attractiveness (DA)			.649	.734	.863
	DA1	.765			
	DA2	.954			
	DA3	.846			
	DA4	.812			
	DA5	.763			
	DA6	.895			
	DA7	.942			
	DA8	.853			
	DA9	.759			
	DA10	.842			
	DA11	.876			
	DA12	.739			
	DA13	.781			
	DA14	.632			
	DA15	.842			
	DA16	.735			
Satisfaction (S)			.746	.853	.756
	S1	.736			
	S2	.653			
	S3	.769			
	S4	.863			
Re-visit Intention (RE)			.743	.846	.843
	RI1	.743			
	RI2	.846			
	RI3	.812			

The table presents the measurement properties of various variables used in the study, including Involvement (I), Knowledge (K), Past Experience (PE), Gastronomy Attractiveness (GA), Destination Attractiveness (DA), Satisfaction (S), and Re-visit Intention (RE). Each variable’s measurement items show standardized loadings, indicating the strength of the relationship between the items and their respective constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which measure the amount of variance captured by the construct versus the amount due to measurement error, range from .549 to

.814, suggesting varying degrees of convergent validity. Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values, which assess the internal consistency of the constructs, generally exceed the threshold of .70, indicating good reliability. Notably, the CR and  $\alpha$  values for most variables are above .80, confirming strong internal consistency, except for Past Experience (PE), which shows lower values. This comprehensive evaluation highlights the robustness of the measurement model in capturing the intended constructs effectively.

The internal consistency of the constructs was gauged using the CR. According to the reliability criteria, alpha coefficients are expected to exceed 0.7 to be acknowledged as exhibiting “high reliability” [94,95], while the CR values should surpass the 0.6 benchmark [96]. The constructs within this study have surpassed these thresholds and are therefore regarded as reliable.

Moreover, factor loadings are recommended to exceed 0.5 to confirm internal consistency [95], a standard that has been met by the constructs in this study.

4.3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

SEM was used to investigate the proposed model. The model fit indices indicated a good match:  $\chi^2/df = 2.811$ , GFI = 0.872, AGFI = 0.839, NFI = 0.832, TLI = 0.865, CFI = 0.883, and RMSEA = 0.067. These indices meet the recommended thresholds, indicating a well-fitting model [97].

Table 3 effectively showcases the discriminant validity of the constructs within the model, with each construct demonstrating more variance with its indicators than with other constructs, a foundational principle for establishing the reliability and validity of a theoretical model in SEM analysis. Involvement (I) has a substantial relationship with itself, as expected, with a high square root of AVE value (.743), suggesting good internal consistency. Its correlations with other constructs are relatively low, indicating distinctiveness Past Experience (PE) and Gastronomy Attractiveness (GA) show negative correlations, which is unusual and may indicate inverse relationships or potentially issues within the dataset or model specifications. Satisfaction (S) and Re-visit Intention (RI) exhibit the highest square root of AVE values (.864 and .862, respectively), highlighting strong internal consistency. Their increasing correlations with other constructs, especially as we move from Involvement (I) to Re-visit Intention (RI), suggest these constructs have stronger relationships with others in the context of this model.

Table 3. The square root of the AVE and interconstruct correlations.

I	PE	GA	DA	S	RI	
I .743 <sup>a</sup>						
PE	.04	.741 <sup>a</sup>				
GA	.045	-.035	.808 <sup>a</sup>			
DA	.05	.04	.06	.806 <sup>a</sup>		
S	.055	.045	.065	.075	.864 <sup>a</sup>	
RI	.06	.05	.07	.08	.085	.862 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The square root of the AVE per construct.

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Tests.

Hypothesis	Structural path	Std. estimate ( $\beta$ )	SE	t value	p value*	Results
H1a	GI $\rightarrow$ GA	.242	.040	6.050	.000	Supported
H1b	GI $\rightarrow$ DA	.263	.063	4.175	.000	Supported
H2a	GK $\rightarrow$ GA	.257	.053	4.849	.000	Supported
H2b	GK $\rightarrow$ DA	.234	.075	3.120	.002	Supported
H3a	PGE $\rightarrow$ GA	.291	.045	6.467	.000	Supported
H3b	PGE $\rightarrow$ DA	.265	.076	3.487	.001	Supported
H4	GA $\rightarrow$ DA	.253	.051	4.961	.000	Supported
H5	GA $\rightarrow$ TS	.249	.053	4.698	.000	Supported
H6	DA $\rightarrow$ TS	.286	.079	3.620	.001	Supported

H7	TS → REI	.275	.046	5.978	.000	Supported
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\*p <.01.

H1a and H1b: Gastronomy involvement (GI) positively influences both gastronomy attractiveness (GA) and destination attractiveness (DA). The results indicate that tourists’ engagement with gastronomic activities enhances their perception of the gastronomy’s appeal ( $\beta = .242$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the overall allure of the destination ( $\beta = .263$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This underscores the pivotal role of active gastronomic engagement in enriching the tourism experience.

H2a and H2b: Gastronomy knowledge (GK) significantly impacts the attractiveness of gastronomy and the destination. The results show that informed tourists, or those with prior knowledge about local gastronomy, have a heightened appreciation for both gastronomic offerings ( $\beta = .257$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the destination ( $\beta = .234$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that enhancing tourists’ knowledge about local cuisine can be a strategic tool in destination marketing.

H3a and H3b: Past gastronomy experiences (PGE) have a significant effect on the perceived attractiveness of gastronomy and the destination. The analyses validate these hypotheses, showing that positive past experiences with local cuisine significantly contribute to tourists’ current perceptions of gastronomy ( $\beta = .291$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and destination attractiveness ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings highlight the lasting impact of memorable gastronomic experiences on tourist perceptions.

H4: The perceived attractiveness of gastronomy strengthens destination attractiveness. This hypothesis is strongly supported ( $\beta = .253$ ,  $p < .01$ ), highlighting the interdependence between gastronomy’s appeal and the broader appeal of the destination.

H5: Gastronomy attractiveness enhances travel satisfaction (TS). This was confirmed ( $\beta = .249$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that satisfying gastronomic experiences are integral to overall travel contentment.

H6 and H7: Destination attractiveness (DA) directly influences tourist satisfaction and the intention to revisit or recommend the destination (REI). The findings affirm these links, with destination attractiveness significantly affecting tourist satisfaction ( $\beta = .286$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and their propensity to recommend the destination ( $\beta = .275$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

5. Conclusions

This study provides comprehensive insights into the pivotal role of gastronomy in enhancing tourist experiences and boosting destination attractiveness, specifically in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). It establishes that gastronomic involvement, knowledge, and past experiences are integral to shaping tourists’ perceptions and overall satisfaction. Tourists who actively engage with and possess prior knowledge about local cuisine are more likely to find the destination appealing and satisfying, which significantly influences their likelihood of revisiting or recommending the destination to others.

One of the key findings is the critical impact of positive past gastronomic experiences on tourists’ perceptions. These experiences are not just about the act of eating but involve a deeper, multidimensional engagement with the local culture, including learning about culinary traditions, participating in food-related activities, and experiencing the sensory aspects of local cuisine. Such interactions contribute to a more profound appreciation of the destination, enhancing the overall travel experience.

The study also reveals that gastronomic attractiveness has a substantial effect on overall travel satisfaction. Satisfying food experiences contribute significantly to tourists’ contentment with their trip, which in turn enhances their likelihood of returning to the destination or recommending it to others. This highlights the integral role of food in the broader tourism experience and underscores the importance of high-quality, authentic culinary offerings.

From a marketing perspective, these findings emphasize the value of incorporating gastronomic elements into destination promotion strategies. Highlighting local culinary attractions and providing educational content about local cuisine can effectively engage tourists seeking authentic and immersive experiences. Investments in developing and promoting gastronomic attributes, such as

organizing food festivals, culinary tours, and cooking classes, can yield substantial benefits in terms of increased tourist satisfaction and destination appeal.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of authenticity and quality in gastronomic offerings. Tourists are increasingly looking for genuine and memorable food experiences that reflect the local culture and traditions. By focusing on the authenticity and uniqueness of local cuisine, destinations can create a strong gastronomic identity that sets them apart from competitors.

The research also points to the need for destinations to adopt a holistic approach in their marketing and development strategies. Gastronomic tourism should be integrated with other cultural and recreational offerings to provide a comprehensive and attractive package for tourists. This integrated approach can enhance the overall appeal of the destination and contribute to higher levels of tourist satisfaction.

Additionally, the findings have important implications for destination management organizations. By focusing on enhancing the overall quality of the tourist experience, both gastronomic and non-gastronomic, destinations can ensure high levels of satisfaction and foster positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Seeking feedback from tourists and engaging them through social media and other platforms can also provide valuable insights into their preferences and help in tailoring offerings to meet their expectations.

This study highlights the significant potential of gastronomy tourism in enhancing tourist satisfaction and destination attractiveness. By offering authentic, high-quality, and engaging culinary experiences, destinations can attract and retain tourists, thereby contributing to the overall success and sustainability of the tourism industry. The research provides a framework for understanding the complex relationships between gastronomic factors and tourist behaviors, offering valuable insights for both theory and practice. Future research should explore these dynamics in diverse cultural and gastronomic contexts to further enrich our understanding of gastronomy tourism and its impact on the tourism industry.

## 6. Discussion

Eating is an essential need for tourists, setting it apart from other activities [98]. Consequently, tourists always allocate part of their budget for food and beverages. When visiting a destination, tourists are likely to sample the local cuisine. Gastronomy plays a pivotal role in showcasing destination culture, as it is shaped by social, natural, and cultural influences, reflecting local traditions through unique culinary values [99]. This culinary element attracts tourists eager to explore other cultures through local food and drink [98]. Additionally, local gastronomy serves as a major draw for tourists and significantly impacts their overall experience [1]. Therefore, establishing strong credibility in gastronomy tourism is crucial for enhancing tourist satisfaction and increasing visits [80].

Investigating the phenomenon of gastronomic tourism in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) at the level of the relationships between gastronomic involvement, gastronomic knowledge, previous gastronomic experiences, and their impact on gastronomy and destination appeal significantly develops the existing literature and contributes to understandings of how tourist satisfaction and the intent to revisit or recommend are formed. The findings reveal several key insights into the role of gastronomy in tourism. First, gastronomic involvement and knowledge are crucial in shaping tourists' perceptions of both the gastronomy and the destination itself. This suggests that tourists who actively engage with and have prior knowledge about local cuisine are more likely to find the destination appealing. This is consistent with modern tourism trends where travelers seek authentic and immersive experiences, often centered around local culinary traditions.

The positive impact of past gastronomic experiences further underscores the importance of providing memorable food-related experiences. Tourists with positive past interactions with local cuisine are more likely to view both the gastronomy and the destination favorably. This aligns with the concept that food experiences are not merely about consumption but are multidimensional, encompassing learning and sensory engagement with the local culture.



Moreover, the significant relationship between gastronomy attractiveness and overall travel satisfaction highlights the integral role of food experiences in the broader tourism experience. Satisfying gastronomic experiences contribute significantly to tourists' overall contentment with their trip, which in turn enhances their likelihood of revisiting or recommending the destination.

From a destination marketing perspective, these findings emphasize the value of incorporating gastronomic elements into marketing campaigns. Promoting local culinary attractions can effectively engage tourists seeking authentic and deep cultural experiences. The results suggest that investments in developing and promoting gastronomic attributes can yield substantial benefits in terms of destination appeal and tourist satisfaction.

Nowadays, gastronomy is not a side feature of a travel experience. Instead, it can be defined as an independent aggregator of tourist activity, attracting considerable attention of travelers and motivating their choice of the destination [100]. Such an approach to gastronomy is consistent with modern tourists' preferences for deep and authentic experiences. According to Hall et al. [101], tourists increasingly seek genuine experiences during their trips, which often direct them to a country's culinary traditions. This understanding is also consistent with the current findings about the positive impact of both gastronomic involvement and knowledge on destination appeal [102]. This research explores the factors influencing tourists' consumption of local food and how these experiences enhance their perception of the destination.

The importance of these dimensions does not lie only in the consumption experience. As suggested by Bessière [12] and further elaborated by Robinson and Getz [2], local cuisines offer a broad sensory experience that facilitates learning about the identity and traditions of a foreign culture. With reference to the studied framework, this idea encompasses the understanding that gastronomic tourism is a complex experience. This understanding refers to the notion that food experiences are multidimensional and include several dimensions beyond consumption [103]. From this perspective, the proposed construct of gastronomic affection discussed in this research may be considered a new field of study. In this context, the developed framework of leisure specialization, normally applied to outdoor activities [104,105] but also enabled for the study of gastronomic tourism, explains how deep interaction with local food culture impacts expectations tourism. Thus, the study reveals the importance of creating memorable gastronomic experiences to improve destination appeal and tourist satisfaction.

From the domain of destination marketing, the developed insights associated with gastronomy are useful in proving the value of this image component. Specifically, the study emphasizes that marketing campaigns that integrate gastronomic attributes are more likely to engage customers searching for authentic culinary experiences [6]. At the same time, the findings on the significant positive effects of food components present an additional reason to invest in the development and promotion of this component [106].

Thus, the study can be supplemented with subsequent explorations of sustainability problems. Approaches may focus on how these local practices can be sustained and developed so that they contribute to both tourists and residents [31,107]. Secondly, the study can include a section on the importance of digital media to form personalities. From this approach, it is interesting to understand how the information represented in review platforms or social media affects the determination and behavior of tourists [108,109].

### *6.1. Theoretical Implications*

Concretely, this research substantially adds to the body of existing knowledge of gastronomy tourism by building a more elaborate understanding of the multifaceted relationships that gastronomic involvement, knowledge, past experiences, attractiveness, and their combined impact create with destination attractiveness and tourist behavioral intentions. At a theoretical level, the applied framework extends the leisure specialization framework developed by McIntyre and Pigram [105] and Bryan [110] into the context of gastronomy tourism, highlighting how tourists' affection for gastronomy-related involvement, knowledge, and past experiences shape perceptions and experiences within this realm. The implication is that the theoretical underpinnings of tourism

studies are enriched by an illustration of the complexity of tourist behavior in the context of gastronomic tourism.

On the other hand, the inclusion of constructs such as gastronomy attractiveness and destination attractiveness in a larger framework also reveals the interdependent nature of these factors and their influence on tourist satisfaction and intentions to revisit or recommend. Such an approach also provides a more holistic view of the gastronomy tourism experience, highlighting the importance of destination appeal and tourist satisfaction. Finally, they indicate that conceivably affects tourist behavior is very wide and more detail understanding of them is required beyond that which realises the existing models, which focussed on singular aspects of the tourist experience.

### *6.2. Practical Implications*

The insights from this research are useful for destination marketers and management organizations. Specifically, it has been shown that by promoting tourists' gastronomic involvement and knowledge, their being more involved and knowledgeable involved has a positive and statistically significant impact on the attractiveness both of gastronomy and the destination. This suggests that the marketing of a destination should not only emphasize the uniqueness of the gastronomic experience to be had in the region but also provide educational information about local cuisine in general to engage potential visitors. To benefit from a positive impact of past gastronomic experiences, destinations should pay special attention to the creation of memorable and enjoyable culinary experiences. This may include different activities like food festivals, culinary tours, and cooking classes that will allow tourists to fully integrate into local gastronomic culture. Enhancing the quality of food service and emphasizing the authenticity and uniqueness of the local cuisine can further enhance gastronomy attractiveness.

Given that the gastronomic dimension has great importance in the potential attractiveness of a destination and the satisfaction of tourists, destinations should consider it as a fundamental pillar in the set of values that it projects globally. Within this programming, the gastronomic offering must be promoted in an integrated manner with other cultural and recreational tourist values, to constitute a global attractive offer. This study clearly reveals that tourist satisfaction plays a crucial role in impacting the intention to revisit the destination or recommend it to others. Destinations should thus pay attention to the overall quality of the tourist experience, both gastronomic and non-gastronomic, with the aim of ensuring high levels of satisfaction. Seeking feedback and involving tourists through social media and other platforms can also facilitate a better understanding of tourist preferences and help in offering improved experiences.

This research has important theoretical and practical implications for the field of gastronomy tourism. The work establishes a graspable and integrative structure that holds the potential of gastronomy in adding value to the attractiveness of the destination and the satisfaction of tourists through the relationships of various gastronomy-related factors with the impression of tourist perception and behavior.

### *6.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

The study, although presenting interesting insights in how gastronomy tourism influences tourist behaviors and attractiveness at the destinations, is not exempt from the following limitations. Since the study focused predominantly on the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the research findings may be inapplicable at other destinations facing different cultural or gastronomic landscapes. The study focused on large dimensions of gastronomy involvement, knowledge, and experiences, without capturing the analytic differences in the tourists' gastronomy preferences or restrictions in their gastronomy, for example by dietary needs or ethical considerations.

Future research opportunities may provide for studies at varied destinations to offer a universal understanding of the gastronomy tourism dynamics. Second, some of the moderators in dietary preference, ethic food choice, and cultural influence on gastronomy tourism are likely roles that can give further insight and increase theoretical and practical value of the findings in different tourism contexts.

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