

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN AYUTTHAYA, THAILAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Thai gastronomic tourism involves culinary heritage resources basis and their amazing tourist destinations which can be generated the squander of the long history of Thai culinary heritage resources. This article addresses this by drawing together knowledge of gastronomy involving with tourism aspect in order to develop a better understanding of the meaning, role, and the importance of gastronomy and culinary heritage in Thailand tourism. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between the forces of localization and the potential for being the gastronomic destination of Ayutthaya. The aim of this paper is to present the gastronomic tourism in Ayutthaya, Thailand. The study was using qualitative method. Data were gathered from documentaries, interviewing, observation and exploring geographic of the tourism area. The result of the culinary aspect discovered that there are the most popular menus of Thai dishes and desserts among those Thai and foreign tourists which included ก๋วยเตี๋ยวเรือ: *kouy tiew rue*, Thai styled rice noodle soup with vegetable and meat, กุ้งแม่น้ำเผา : *kung-mae-naam-pao*, charcoal grilled river prawn, and the dessert is โรตีสายไหม : the candy floss wrapped with roti flour.

KEYWORDS

Gastronomic, Tourism, Ayutthaya

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is one of the ASEAN country members with a thriving of tourism industry aspect. According to the survey data shown on Table 1, the total numbers of international tourist arrivals to Thailand are increased to more than 19 million people last year [1]. However, Thailand tourism has a tendency to raise and expand. Specially, Gastronomic tourism involves culinary heritage resources basis and their amazing tourist destinations which can be generate the squander of the long history of Thai culinary heritage resources. Hence, Thai National Economic and Social development plan started from the eighth plan (1997 – 2001) up to the eleventh plan (2012 – 2016) had attempted to determine strategies and focused on tourism development by using human as a hub of expansion and creating natural resources for highly profit and for social reinforcement [2].

TABLE 1
INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS TO THAILAND

Month	2010	2011	%	2012	%
January	1,605,505	<u>1,805,947</u>	12.48	<u>1,944,130</u>	7.65
February	1,614,844	<u>1,802,476</u>	11.62	<u>1,838,595</u>	2.00
March	1,439,401	<u>1,702,233</u>	18.26	<u>1,906,402</u>	11.99
April	1,108,209	<u>1,552,337</u>	40.08	<u>1,659,021</u>	6.87
May	826,610	<u>1,407,407</u>	70.26	<u>1,523,782</u>	8.27
June	964,959	<u>1,484,708</u>	53.86	<u>1,649,664</u>	11.11
July	1,275,766	<u>1,719,538</u>	34.78	<u>1,799,184</u>	4.63
August	1,270,883	<u>1,726,559</u>	35.86	<u>1,925,806</u>	11.54
September	1,214,810	<u>1,486,333</u>	22.35	<u>1,603,270</u>	7.87
October	1,316,806	<u>1,422,210</u>	8.00	<u>1,714,152</u>	20.53
November	1,478,856	<u>1,291,548</u>	-12.67	<u>2,073,817</u>	60.57
December	1,819,751	<u>1,774,749</u>	-2.47		
Total	15,936,400	<u>19,230,470</u>	20.67	<u>19,761,794</u>	13.57

Gastronomic tourism or culinary tourism is experiencing the food of the country, region or area, and is now considered a vital component of the tourism experience. In gastronomic tourism, food and beverages are the main factors that motivate a person to travel to a particular destination. Dining out is common among tourists and "food is believed to rank alongside climate, accommodation, and scenery" in importance to tourists [3]. In Thailand, experiencing food and shopping Thai local products tend to be largely a domestic tourism activity for both Thai and foreign tourists [4]. A domestic survey of leisure travelers in Thailand found that almost 50% engaged in culinary related activities [5]. According to the TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) tourism journal (4/2011 - 1/2012), the street food in Bangkok has won the first prize of top ten cities for street food award in 2012 [6]. Thus, TAT predicts that Thai gastronomic tourism will grow rapidly in the coming years.

The earlier stage, academic institute such as universities and several of Thai culinary institutes came into a major part to join with the TAT regarding to share the informative knowledge for the quality input in order to set the development research strategies, the innovation of producing tourism products. As well as the services aspect base on Thai culture and local intellectual. The new entrepreneur development which drives to establish co-operate global connection to create value added of tourism products and services especially, food and beverage industries serving for tourism in overall.

THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

This article addresses this by drawing together knowledge of gastronomy involving with the tourism aspects in order to develop a better understanding of the role and development of gastronomic destinations of Thailand. The study is using qualitative research methodologies. The data are derived from the questionnaires, interview, observation and exploring geographic of the research areas which prominently involved with the signature food of Ayutthaya.

Particular attention is paid to the relationship between the forces of localization and the emergence of gastronomic tourism and to food as a source of authentic regional identity. The aim of this paper is to present the gastronomic tourism in Ayutthaya, Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology is designed to account for: 1) research into the processes of institutional gastronomic route destinations; 2) how Thai culinary heritage affects on the satisfaction and expectation of tourists; 3) the nature of the relationship between the gastronomy and tourism; 4) the role of food in tourist motivation.

In order to research these topics, I will principally utilize these four techniques: 1) Exploratory method – data collection; 2) Qualitative method; 3) Interviews with tourists and local people by focusing on gastronomic destinations such as the visitors, and tourism providers.

MEANING, ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

The word *gastronomy* itself was first introduced in France last two centuries, when the French author Jacques Berchoux titled his poem *La Gastronomies, ou l'homme des champs table* (Gastronomy, or the peasant at the table). The word became popular and in 1835 was included in the dictionary of the French Academy as ‘the art of good eating’ [7]. Gastronomy emphasizes that food is a core component of every culture. Indeed when people visit to another place, they somehow may have the opportunities to perceive the local food which differed from their usual life. Thus, a gastronomic tourist is a particular people who are willing to travel the other place in attempt to taste and experience locally authentic cuisines of the destinations. Culinary history is intrinsically linked to the cultural history of the country of origin. According to the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA), culinary tourism is defined as “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences” [8]. Therefore, gastronomic tourism refers to trips made to destinations where the local food and beverages are the main motivating factors for travel.

Thailand is a paradise for gastronomy tourists. Indeed the country produces a great variety of food and produces it in great quantity. Thailand is one of those countries that are not only food self-sufficient but are also big food exporters on the world market. Moreover, Thailand is being ranked among the top 5 producers of food in the world [9]. Food and beverage consumption is an important component of visitor expenditure in Thailand. The TAT states that in 2011, on average, food travelers in Ayutthaya spent around 1,489.96 baht per person per day, with almost half (around 48%) of their travel budget going towards food-related activities [10]. These can be considered the food travelers tend to spend a significantly higher amount of their overall travel budget on food-related activities such as meals and local food products.

In any case, gastronomy plays a major role in the way tourists experience the destination, and indicate that some travelers would return to the same destination to savor its unique gastronomy. To this direction, more and more tourism providers are now focusing on the food element as a central part of its destination tourism product. As well as the gastronomic tourism provides visitors with both of an authentic culinary education and a far greater understanding, appreciation and connection to a destination.

AYUTTHAYA: THE POTENTIAL FOR BEING THE GASTRONOMIC DESTINATION

Gastronomic tourism, offering impressive food and drink experiences, could significantly create motivation for travel. In this regard, Thailand, widely recognized as a major ‘food paradise’ destination, could be easily employed as a prime example. Ayutthaya is indeed a complicated combination of numerous different races that have tightly knitted and become a land of multi-cultures. In fact, its culinary together with its natural and historic sites as well as the friendly Thai society, complicated combination of numerous different races, is inarguably a major factor of its successful tourism industry.

With an aim of providing a unique example of how Thai, Chinese and Muslim culinary are merged and contribute to the successful local food tourism. This article, therefore, features several the most popular and unique local products in Ayutthaya Province, where Thai, Chinese and Muslim cultures, particularly their culinary, have successfully mingled.

FIGURE 1
THE HEAD OF THE SANDSTONE BUDDHA IMAGE IN AYUTTHAYA



Ayutthaya province has been seen as a wellspring of cultural authenticity. The TAT has put the efforts to attract tourists by its historic destinations of this old capital city, Ayutthaya. Apparently, the obvious problem occurs in the attractive destinations have not been disrepair and getting less attention from tourists point of views. In recent years, an economical growing emphasis has been placed on tourism experiences and attractions related to food. In many cases eating while on holiday includes the "consumption" of local heritage, comparable to what is experienced when visiting historical sites and museums. Despite the increasing attention, however, systematic research on the subject has been nearly absent.

In Ayutthaya, some destinations have begun to realize that there is great potential for food tourism to offer a sustainable tourism product, whether it is the succulent charcoal grilled river prawn (กุ้งแม่น้ำเผา : kung-mae-naam-pao) of the Thai restaurants in the local markets; the authentic styled rice noodle soup (ก๋วยเตี๋ยวเรือ : kouy-tiew-rue) of the Thai-Chinese communities, or the renowned local dessert souvenir, a candy floss wrapped with roti flour (โรตีสายไหม : roti-saai-mai) of the Thai-Muslim communities. One of the best examples of food tourism has been the rise in prominence of Ayutthaya as a food tourism destination whether it is festivals, the rice noodle soup's trip created by the TAT or the local Thai restaurants in the river markets. Although Ayutthaya Province is adjacent to Bangkok, its river markets uniquely preserve remains the characteristic of the ancient communities and represents the identity of an ancestor's table.

FIGURE 2
THE CHARCOAL GRILLED RIVER PRAWN



FIGURE 3
THE AUTHENTIC STYLED RICE NOODLE SOUP (LEFT),
THE RICE NOODLE SOUP RESTAURANT IN AYUTTHAYA (RIGHT)



FIGURE 4
ROTI FLOUR (LEFT), A CANDY FLOSS WRAPPED WITH ROTI FLOUR (RIGHT)



Ayutthaya in the present day has prospered into a major food tourism destination with a density of high quality Thai restaurants and the Thai-Chinese styled rice noodle soup shops, an abundance of local food souvenirs in the river markets and food festivals along with a plenty of events to attract tourists. From the interviews and observations, the result found that Ayutthaya is absolutely a food destination for gastronomic tourists and the city illustrates its success through these concepts: 1) presenting food as a means to create cultural capital and social status, 2) developing a density of local food product which results in a tourism eating and shopping experience, 3) creating a local authentic promise based upon good quality and fair pricing, 4) creating a unique food product better than that found in other regional food destinations, 5) local entrepreneurs seeing themselves as being involved in tourism and 6) tourism providers focusing on food as a point of difference.

CONCLUSION

In Thailand, leisure trends have identified that the so-called gastronomic tourists are looking for a more participatory style of holiday experience, which satisfies their interest in food and beverages and contributes to their personal development and social status. TAT is now recognizing the potential of gastronomic tourism as a powerful instrument to identify and promote places, regions or even entire countries.

As food and beverages are increasingly becoming one of the main reasons for travel, Ayutthaya is attempting in a big way to combine food, local souvenirs and culture into a total tourism experience – which should be authentic and reflecting the local and unique flavors of a particular areas of the province. Potential in competitive of gastronomy tourism in Ayutthaya niche market has the strength point related to the variety of authentic multicultural products in the sense of cuisine. Thus, TAT has supported and sustained the emergence of gastronomy tourism in Ayutthaya as an emergence of cultural resource.

Although all those popular dishes: the river prawn, rice noodle soup and the sweet candy could be experienced all over Thailand, their traditional methods to prepare and cook in Ayutthaya Province have a very unique way of preserving the original identities of their famous dishes which could be better than that found in other regional food destinations. Multiculturalism has become an everyday concept in the daily life of the consumer, what were once exotic foods have become foods of first choice and today the authentic styled rice noodle soup (ก๋วยเตี๋ยวเรือ : kouy-tiew-rue) is absolutely the Thai people's favorite dish.

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