



Received: 11 January 2026

Revised: 23 January 2026

Accepted: 27 January 2026

# FROM NICHE TO NECESSITY: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL EVOLUTION OF CULINARY TOURISM AND POST-PANDEMIC RESILIENCE (2001-2025)

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(This article belongs to the Theme 2: Heritage and Wisdom in the Digital Age)

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## Abstract

Culinary tourism has transformed from a niche activity into a dominant travel motivator over the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025). This critical review employs a multidimensional framework to analyze this evolution, integrating socio-cultural, economic, and technological perspectives across pre-pandemic, crisis, and recovery phases. Grounded in theories such as Service-Dominant Logic and Transformative Learning, the study delineates the shift from the "experience economy" to a post-pandemic focus on authenticity, well-being, and hyper-localism. Significant attention is given to digital disruptions, from "camera eat first" behaviors to the algorithmic influence of platforms like TikTok on destination branding. Furthermore, the paper rigorously examines the "sustainability paradox," revealing a persistent gap between travelers' environmental awareness and their actual on-site consumption habits, particularly among Generation Z. By addressing the complexities of cultural politics, gastrodiploacy, and economic disparities within local food systems, the review identifies critical research gaps. It concludes that the sector's future viability relies on bridging the divide between digital trends and tangible sustainable practices, necessitating collaborative governance to foster inclusive, resilient, and culturally respectful gastronomic destinations.

**Keywords:** Culinary Tourism Evolution, Post-Pandemic Gastronomy, Digital Food Culture, Sustainable Consumption, Destination Resilience

**Citation Information:** Phanpanya, K., Chanchaipitiphath, N., Jaepo, S., & Darmawijaya, I. (2025). From Niche to Necessity: A Multidimensional Evolution of Culinary Tourism and Post-Pandemic Resilience (2001-2025). *Thai Arts and Culture Review*, 1(2), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.14456/tacr.2025.6>

## Introduction

Culinary tourism (encompassing food tourism and gastronomic tourism) has emerged as one of the most significant phenomena in the modern tourism industry, particularly during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025). This transformation of food from an ancillary element of the travel experience to a primary motivator for travel reflects a fundamental shift in contemporary tourist consumption patterns and behaviors (Hall & Sharples, 2004; Long, 2004). Research over the past two decades indicates that tourists allocate up to one-third of their total travel budget to food and beverages (Ellis et al., 2018; The World Food Travel Association, 2020). This figure not only underscores the economic importance of culinary tourism but also highlights how food has become a crucial tool for creating cultural experiences, expressing local identity, and imbuing travel with deeper meaning for tourists (Fusté-Forné, 2020; Orea-Giner & Fuste-Forné, 2023).

The significance of culinary tourism extends beyond its economic dimension to encompass broader socio-cultural aspects. Local food serves as a representation of cultural heritage, a symbol of ethnic identity, and a medium for transmitting history and traditional knowledge to future generations (Long, 2004; Orea-Giner & Fuste-Forné, 2023). In the tourism context, food serves as a "cultural bridge" that enables tourists to more deeply understand and experience the local way of life (Fusté-Forné, 2020). Nevertheless, the commercialization of food as a tourism product raises important issues of cultural politics, particularly concerning who has the authority to determine which dishes are presented, whose recipes represent a culture, and who holds the power to interpret and define food within the tourism context (Long, 2018).

The term "culinary tourism" is often used interchangeably with various other terms in academic literature, such as food tourism and gastronomic tourism. Generally, these terms refer to "eating out of curiosity" from an anthropological perspective or "travel motivated by food" from an industry perspective (Hall & Sharples, 2004; Long, 2004). The types of culinary tourism experiences are diverse, ranging from dining in various restaurant settings (fine dining, casual dining, street food), participating in cooking classes, attending food festivals, exploring culinary trails, to engaging in wine tourism and agri-tourism, all interconnected with the food experience (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall & Sharples, 2004).

The objective of this research paper is to provide a foundational understanding of culinary tourism and to highlight its current state and trends across various dimensions, specifically business and economic, socio-cultural, technological and digital innovation, governance and public policy, and sustainability. This paper employs a documentary research methodology, reviewing secondary data from books, research studies, and articles published in academic journals between 2001 and 2025, and presenting the findings through descriptive analysis.

The conceptual framework for this review and analysis draws upon several relevant interdisciplinary theories, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which explains tourist food consumption behavior; Service-Dominant Logic, focusing on value co-creation in food experiences (Vargo & Lusch, 2004); and Transformative Learning Theory, which describes shifts in understanding and learning through food experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Furthermore, the analytical framework categorizes the timeline into three significant periods: 1) the pre-COVID-19 era (2001-2019), characterized by growth and development; 2) the COVID-19 era (2020-2021), marked by crisis and adaptation; and 3) the post-COVID-19 era (2022-2025), representing recovery and new trends. This periodization provides a clearer understanding of the dynamics and transformations in culinary tourism.

## Theoretical Foundations and Dimensions of Culinary Tourism

A profound understanding of culinary tourism necessitates diverse theoretical frameworks spanning multiple disciplines. Over the past two decades, research has developed and applied various theories to elucidate the behaviors, motivations, and experiences of culinary tourists. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is among the most prominent frameworks for explaining tourists' intentions and behaviors regarding the consumption of local food (Ajzen,

1991). This theory posits that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are critical factors influencing the intention to try local food, which, in turn, leads to actual behavior (Han, 2021). A recent study in Indonesia expanded the TPB by integrating concepts from the experience economy, narrative engagement, and sustainability ethics, revealing that perceptions of food authenticity, cultural food attachment, and sustainability awareness significantly influence the intention to try local food (Susanto, 2023).

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) is another pivotal theoretical framework that emphasizes value co-creation in culinary tourism experiences (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This perspective views food experiences not as unilaterally provided by service providers but as the outcome of interactions and co-creation among tourists, baristas, producers, and local communities. Research on slow food tourism, exemplified by a case study of a specialty coffee shop in Vietnam, has developed a "transformative value co-creation" framework that integrates SDL with Transformative Learning Theory. This framework identifies six dimensions of transformative learning through food experiences: disorienting dilemma, self-examination, personalization, co-creation, transformation, and reintegration. This process underscores mindful consumption and intentional living as central to slow food tourism (Tran, 2025).

Tourist motivations in culinary tourism have been extensively studied, with numerous studies identifying key drivers behind culinary tourist behavior. These include cultural exploration, interpersonal relations, excitement, sensory appeal, health concerns, learning and knowledge, and prestige (Kim et al., 2009; Kim & Eves, 2012). However, these motivations are not uniformly important for all tourists. Studies categorize tourists into different segments based on the importance they attribute to food in their travel experiences, including "culinary enthusiasts" who view food as the primary purpose of travel, "cultural ambassadors" who see food as a conduit for cultural understanding, and "culinary learners" who seek to develop culinary skills and knowledge (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

The concept of authenticity is a complex and widely debated topic within culinary tourism literature. Modern research has advanced a multi-dimensional model of authenticity, encompassing true-to-ideal (idealized authenticity), true-to-fact (objective authenticity, e.g., ingredients and techniques), and true-to-self (personal and experiential authenticity) (Wang, 1999; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Studies indicate that these distinct dimensions of authenticity elicit different emotional responses, and the type of restaurant (e.g., ethnic restaurants owned by co-ethnics versus non-co-ethnics) also influences perceived authenticity (Hyun & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, the "authenticity paradox" highlights that when local food is commodified for tourism, producers often adapt recipes and methods to suit diverse tourist preferences, thereby altering the product's original authenticity and creating a tension between business competitiveness and cultural preservation (Aybek & Alphan, 2021).

The core dimensions of culinary tourism can be classified in several ways. The socio-cultural dimension emphasizes food as cultural heritage, a symbol of identity, and a vehicle for preserving local knowledge (Long, 2004). The business and economic dimension focuses on income generation, employment, and local economic development through the food and tourism industries (Timothy, 2016). The sustainability dimension involves using local ingredients, managing food waste, and balancing tourism development with environmental and social conservation (Hall & Gössling, 2013; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Lastly, the experiential dimension underscores sensory, emotional, and educational engagement, collectively creating memorable experiences for tourists (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The array of food types and activities within culinary tourism is remarkably diverse, ranging from dining in various restaurant settings (fine dining, casual dining, street food) and specialty coffee shops to wine, beer, and spirits tourism (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Specialized activities such as cooking classes enable tourists to learn local culinary techniques; food festivals serve as platforms for showcasing food culture and generating community income; culinary trails and food routes are designed for tourists to explore local foods and products; and farm-to-table experiences directly connect tourists with food producers (Hjalager & Richards, 2002;

Timothy, 2016). This wide variety of forms reflects the inherent complexity and richness of culinary tourism as a continuously evolving phenomenon.

### **Evolution and Trends of Culinary Tourism Across Different Periods**

Culinary tourism in the first quarter of the 21st century has undergone several significant transformations, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. This era can be divided into three distinct periods, each with unique characteristics. The pre-COVID-19 era (2001-2019) was a period of continuous growth and increasing recognition of culinary tourism as a high-potential segment within the tourism industry. Early 21st-century research indicated that food had transitioned from a supplementary role to a primary travel motivator for an increasing number of tourists (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall & Sharples, 2004). Surveys in the late 2010s found that up to 53% of tourists in some markets identified themselves as "culinary travelers," prioritizing food experiences (The World Food Travel Association, 2020). This period also witnessed the growth of diverse culinary tourism products and services, such as food festivals, which became a global phenomenon. Surveys revealed that food festivals constituted approximately 30% of the overall festival sector and had significant economic impacts on local accommodation (Bottyán, 2015).

The concept of the "experience economy" heavily influenced the development of culinary tourism prior to COVID. Tourists began seeking experiences beyond mere food consumption, desiring "stories," "authenticity," and "participation" in the food process (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The proliferation of cooking classes and culinary workshops for tourists, especially in renowned culinary destinations like Italy, Thailand, and France, reflects the demand for participatory experiences (Kokkranikal & Carabell, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of agritourism with food experiences grew substantially, with farmers and food producers opening their farms and facilities to visitors, offering farm-to-table experiences that directly connected consumers with food sources (Testa et al., 2019). This period also saw a rise in wine tourism, particularly in acclaimed wine-producing regions such as Napa Valley in the USA, Bordeaux in France, and Tuscany in Italy (Hall & Sharples, 2008).

The pre-COVID-19 period was also characterized by the growth of social media, which profoundly impacted culinary tourism. The "Camera eat first" phenomenon, in which tourists photograph and share their food on platforms like Instagram and Facebook before consumption, has become common behavior (Wachyuni & Yusuf, 2021). Sharing food images and experiences on social media not only reflected a quest for social validation but also served as a means for tourists to communicate personal identity and tastes (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015). These platforms became crucial sources of information for tourists researching and evaluating restaurants, with TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and The Fork emerging as primary decision-making tools (Leung et al., 2013).

The COVID-19 era (2020-2021) presented an unprecedented crisis for the tourism and food industries. The pandemic led to widespread disruptions in international travel and to lockdown measures, which, coupled with restaurant closures, severely affected food and service businesses (Hall et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2021). However, the crisis also stimulated significant innovation and adaptation. The concept of "virtual culinary tourism" emerged as a new alternative for tourists unable to travel; they consumed food content through online cooking shows, food blogs, YouTube food vlogs, and social media (Long, 2022). This phenomenon demonstrated that the philosophy of "eating out of curiosity" could endure in a digital format, offering tourists broader access to global food cultures than ever before.

Restaurants during this period rapidly adapted to survive, with the expansion of takeout and delivery services becoming a primary strategy. Innovations such as outdoor dining, contactless service, and the use of QR code technology for menus became new norms (de Souza et al., 2022; Fainshtein et al., 2023). Many restaurants also focused on community and employee support through initiatives such as providing free meals to medical personnel and vulnerable groups, maintaining employees' salaries during business closures, and developing mental

health support programs for staff. These efforts underscored the increasing importance of the social and community dimensions of culinary tourism during the crisis.

The post-COVID-19 era (2022-2025) is characterized by recovery and the emergence of new trends. International tourism has rapidly rebounded, reaching 88% of pre-COVID levels in 2023 and projected to fully recover by the end of 2024 (UNWTO, 2024). However, this recovery does not signify a return to the old normal; significant shifts in tourist behavior and expectations have occurred. A study in New Zealand identified three key post-COVID trends: "Getting back to basics," emphasizing simplicity and authenticity; "Valuing local and locals," with greater importance placed on local food and communities; and "Food for well-being," focusing on health and wellness (Reichenberger & Yeoman, 2022). These trends reflect a change in tourist values, prioritizing sustainability, social responsibility, and quality of life.

COVID-19 safety measures in restaurants have become a crucial factor influencing satisfaction and destination loyalty. Research on UNESCO World Heritage sites found that tourists' perceptions of safety measures significantly influenced their dining experiences and revisit intentions (Huete-Alcocer & Hernandez-Rojas, 2022). Furthermore, the sustained use of digital technology adopted during COVID-19 remains a prominent feature of this era. The continuous use of social media to promote culinary tourism, particularly on rapidly growing platforms like TikTok, has become a vital tool for shaping destination image and influencing tourists' dining behavior (Suttikun et al., 2025). The role of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in shaping tastes, recommending restaurants, and creating new food trends has become increasingly significant, especially among Generation Z and Millennials, who are primarily digital natives.

### **Interdisciplinary Analysis of Culinary Tourism Dimensions**

Culinary tourism in the first quarter of the 21st century is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that demands an interdisciplinary analytical perspective for a comprehensive understanding. The socio-cultural dimension forms a fundamental bedrock of culinary tourism. Local food serves as a potent representation of cultural heritage and a symbol of ethnic identity. Studies on Southeast Asian cuisine, for instance, reveal that traditional foods reflect a nation's history, climate, and cultural exchanges (Putra et al., 2023). Food is not merely a consumable item but a "cultural medium" that conveys community stories, values, and indigenous knowledge (Koograsang et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the issue of "cultural politics" remains a significant challenge, particularly regarding the power dynamics that shape which foods are presented, whose recipes are adopted as cultural representations, and who defines and interprets food within the tourism context (Long, 2018). This issue becomes even more intricate when dealing with ethnic foods, often characterized by their divergence from mainstream culture and perceived "otherness," which paradoxically attracts culinary tourists (Long, 2018).

The role of food as a tool for cultural diplomacy (gastrodiplomacy) has garnered increasing attention over the past two decades. Countries such as Thailand, South Korea, and Japan have leveraged food to promote their soft power and enhance their national image on the global stage (Maosul et al., 2025; Ulung, 2025). Food festivals and related cultural activities have become vital platforms for showcasing cultural identity and fostering understanding between diverse cultures. A comparative study of food festivals in Turkey and Italy found that these events not only promote cultural comprehension but also strengthen local pride and stimulate the preservation of culinary heritage (Gündüz et al., 2024).

The business and economic dimension highlights the significant impact of culinary tourism on both local and national economies. A study in Thailand utilizing a Dynamic Input-Output (I-O) model identified the primary culinary tourism sectors with high economic impact: food processing and preserving, other food products, food and beverage serving activities, and other food services. The study further revealed that while Thailand's Eastern region was the second-largest generator of culinary tourism income, the Northeastern region, despite being the largest geographically, generated less income, indicating regional disparities and development opportunities (Piboonrunroj et al., 2023; Thongkaw et al., 2024). At the local level, food festivals can generate substantial economic benefits. Research on Himachali food festivals in

India indicated that tourists spent an average of \$275.02 and reported an average satisfaction level of 3.03 out of 5, highlighting both revenue potential and the need for improved experience quality (Balodi et al., 2025).

Local food products with Geographical Indications (GIs) significantly contribute to the development of culinary tourism. Research shows that registered GI products influence culinary tourism development by up to 60%. In comparison, local food products with GI recognition (though not officially registered) influence culinary tourism development by 37.7% (Pamukçu et al., 2021). These figures underscore the importance of intellectual property protection and value creation for local products through certification systems. The culinary tourism value chain involves multiple stakeholders, including tourists, restaurant operators, farmers, producers, government agencies, destination marketing organizations (DMOs), and local communities. Active participation and collaboration among these stakeholders are crucial for the sustainability and success of culinary tourism (Hribar et al., 2021; Liutikas, 2023).

The dimension of technology and digital innovation has emerged as a key driver of digital culinary tourism, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era. Social media's role in shaping tourist behavior and expectations has markedly increased. Recent research on TikTok's influence on tourist dining experiences found that content authenticity, influencer attachment, and cultural inspiration significantly affect tourists' perceived cultural competence in local restaurants. This, in turn, contributes to memorable dining experiences, destination attachment, eudaimonic well-being, and online sharing behavior (Suttikun et al., 2025). The "Camera eat first" phenomenon, where tourists photograph food before consumption to share on Instagram and TikTok, has become an integral part of contemporary dining experiences. Studies on the motivations behind this behavior suggest that tourists use food photography as a tool to communicate personal identity, express tastes, and create impressions on online social networks (Wachyuni & Yusuf, 2021).

Digital marketing via social media has become a critical strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the food and tourism sectors, especially in developing countries. Research in Indonesia and Malaysia found that small food businesses that effectively employ digital marketing strategies can significantly expand their customer base, build brand image, and boost revenue (Anwar, 2025; Rahim et al., 2025). The role of YouTube food vloggers is also noteworthy, particularly in inspiring Millennials and Generation Z to plan local street food experiences (Briliana et al., 2020, 2021). Furthermore, the adoption of digital payment technologies, such as QRIS in Indonesia, has facilitated and enhanced the tourist experience in local food markets (Waris et al., 2025).

The dimension of governance and public policy plays a vital role in the development and sustainability of culinary tourism. A study on factors influencing the sustainability of culinary tourism destinations in Guilin, a UNESCO World Heritage city in China, identified government support as one of the most critical factors. Other significant factors include destination marketing, visitor experience, destination image, stakeholder engagement, and core food products (Long et al., 2024). Developing appropriate policies and regulations is essential to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental preservation. The role of DMOs in creating positive visitor experiences, managing destination image, and coordinating stakeholder efforts is also paramount.

The sustainability dimension has become one of the most critical issues in modern culinary tourism, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, when heightened awareness of the environmental and social impacts of human activities has underscored its importance. A study of Generation Z's sustainable food consumption behavior in the context of culinary tourism revealed intriguing, sometimes contradictory findings. While Generation Z exhibits high environmental knowledge and ethical food choices, and believes that sustainable food consumption improves personal and societal well-being, the actual sustainability of their food choices is often constrained by factors such as time and budget. The study also found that Generation Z's eating habits are more sustainable when eating at home than when traveling, as

travel is frequently perceived as an escape from daily routines, leading to a relaxation of norms (Orea-Giner & Fuste-Forné, 2023).

Environmental sustainability involves using local ingredients to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions, managing food waste, and implementing eco-friendly practices in restaurants and tourist venues. A study on Sustainable Local Food Supply Chains (SLFSC) in the United States during COVID-19 found that green restaurants, which prioritize local ingredients and sustainable practices, not only had a lower environmental impact but also forged stronger local community ties and exhibited greater resilience during the crisis (Alsetoohy et al., 2021). Socio-cultural sustainability encompasses preserving culinary heritage, promoting community cohesion, and supporting social equity. Research on the perspectives of residents and food festival organizers regarding socio-environmental sustainability found that both groups value local community support, job creation, and cultural preservation. However, challenges persist in balancing economic demands with environmental and social responsibilities (Thelen & Kim, 2024).

### **Synthesis and Future Directions of Culinary Tourism**

This comprehensive literature review of culinary tourism during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025) reveals its significant evolution from an ancillary activity in the travel experience to a primary motivator and a multi-billion-dollar industry. This transformation reflects a fundamental shift in tourists' perceptions of food, from merely a basic necessity to viewing it as a "gateway to culture," a "medium for learning," and a "memorable experience" (Hall & Sharples, 2004; Long, 2004; Ellis et al., 2018). The overall trajectory of culinary tourism in recent times demonstrates continuous growth in the pre-COVID-19 era, rapid adaptation during the crisis, and a post-pandemic recovery coupled with new trends emphasizing sustainability, authenticity, and well-being.

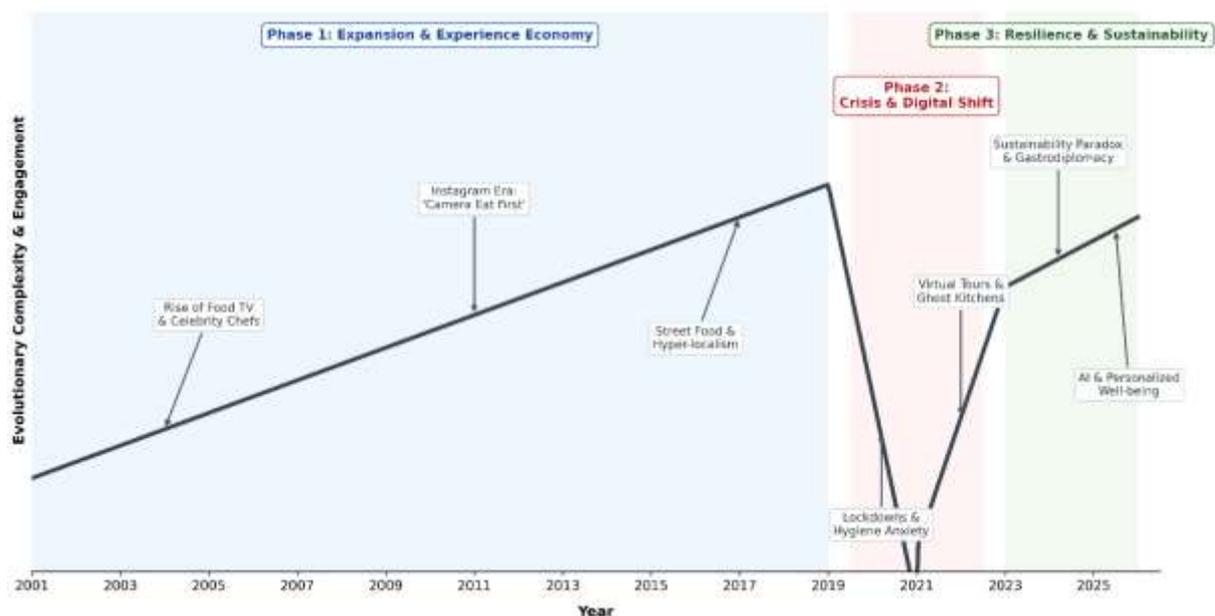
Key findings across various dimensions highlight the complexity and interconnectedness of culinary tourism. In the socio-cultural dimension, local food reaffirms its role as cultural heritage and a tool for communicating identity. However, challenges persist in cultural politics, particularly regarding authority over defining and interpreting food in the tourism context (Long, 2018). Economically and commercially, culinary tourism demonstrates significant potential to generate income and employment and to stimulate local economies, particularly for SMEs and rural communities (Hall & Gössling, 2013; Timothy, 2016). However, economic benefits are often unevenly distributed, as exemplified by regions within Thailand experiencing disparate impacts. In the realm of technology and digital innovation, social media and influencers have become critical drivers shaping tourist behaviors and expectations, especially among Generation Z and Millennials who predominantly rely on digital platforms for decision-making (Leung et al., 2013; Orea-Giner & Fuste-Forné, 2023).

Regarding governance and public policy, governmental support, stakeholder collaboration, and the development of balanced policies are crucial factors for the sustainability of culinary tourism (Long et al., 2024). Moreover, in the sustainability dimension, the tension between awareness and actual practice remains a challenge, particularly because tourists exhibit less sustainable behavior when traveling than at home, despite high environmental awareness (Xu et al., 2020; Orea-Giner & Fuste-Forné, 2023). These findings underscore the need to develop strategies to bridge the intention-behavior gap, specifically by designing systems that make sustainable choices easier and more accessible for tourists.

The impact of COVID-19 on culinary tourism represents a significant and long-term turning point. This crisis not only severely disrupted the tourism and food industries in the short term but also accelerated several critical shifts that are likely to persist (Hall et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2021). The emergence of virtual culinary tourism demonstrates that food experiences can manifest digitally, and digital platforms can facilitate easier access to global food cultures. The continued prevalence of crisis-era technological innovations, such as QR code menus, contactless payments, and intensified social media usage, represents a lasting legacy of the COVID era. The shift in tourist values emphasizing "Getting back to basics," "Valuing local

and locals," and "Food for well-being" reflects a profound re-evaluation of the meaning of travel and consumption following the crisis experience (Reichenberger & Yeoman, 2022). Consequently, these disruptive shifts have fundamentally reshaped the industry's developmental curve, moving it from a linear growth model to a complex, resilience-oriented paradigm that necessitates a new visual understanding.

To synthesize the extensive literature reviewed and visualize these structural changes, Figure 1 delineates the evolutionary trajectory of culinary tourism over the past quarter-century. The framework identifies three distinct phases: the pre-pandemic era (2001-2019), characterized by the rapid expansion of the experience economy and digital documentation (e.g., 'camera eat first'); the disruptive crisis phase (2019-2022), which necessitated digital pivots like virtual tourism; and the current post-pandemic phase (2023-2025+). As illustrated, the trajectory does not merely return to the pre-COVID baseline but shifts towards a 'new normal' where sustainability, health, and authenticity act as primary drivers. This graphical representation underscores the shift from quantitative growth (mass consumption) to qualitative deepening (values-based engagement), highlighting the complex interplay between technological advancement and the renewed traveler desire for meaningful, localized connections.



**Figure 1** The Evolutionary Trajectory of Culinary Tourism: Paradigm Shifts from Experience Economy to Resilient Sustainability (2001-2025)

Several significant research gaps and future directions can be identified from this review. Firstly, there is a pressing need to develop theoretical frameworks appropriate for diverse local and cultural contexts, particularly in developing countries. Most current theories are developed in Western contexts and may not fully explain tourists' behaviors and motivations in other settings. Secondly, research on sustainability in culinary tourism must expand its understanding of how to reduce the intention-behavior gap, especially by investigating factors that facilitate or hinder sustainable choices in the tourism context. Thirdly, the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on tourist behaviors and expectations require continuous study, particularly to monitor whether post-COVID trends persist or gradually evolve. Fourthly, the future role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in culinary tourism is an intriguing area of inquiry. The application of AI for personalized restaurant recommendations, Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) for creating immersive food experiences, and blockchain for ensuring food traceability and authenticity are areas warranting further investigation. Fifthly, research on culinary diversity and heritage needs to give greater attention to minority group cuisines

and indigenous foods, which are often neglected in mainstream literature. Sixthly, studies on food safety and hygiene in the post-COVID context are critical, as they impact tourist confidence and satisfaction. Moreover, finally, research on policies and regulations to balance economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability is essential.

Recommendations for each stakeholder group can be summarized as follows: For academics, promoting interdisciplinary research that connects various dimensions of culinary tourism is vital. Developing theoretical frameworks tailored to local contexts and employing mixed-methods research will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. For practitioners and businesses, effective adoption of digital technologies, emphasizing sustainability and local ingredients, creating authentic and memorable experiences, and adapting to changing tourist behaviors are crucial strategies. For governments and policymakers, developing policies that support sustainable culinary tourism, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, backing infrastructure and standards development, and preserving and promoting culinary heritage are pivotal to shaping the industry's future direction.

In conclusion, culinary tourism in the first quarter of the 21st century has proven to be a highly dynamic, complex, and significant phenomenon across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. The industry's adaptability and development during the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated its resilience and innovativeness, while simultaneously exposing challenges and the imperative for sustainable and equitable development. The future of culinary tourism will depend on the collective ability of all stakeholder groups to collaborate, balance economic benefits with cultural and environmental responsibilities, and respond to the evolving expectations of new generations of tourists who value authenticity, sustainability, and meaningful experiences.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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