
Contribution of Traditional Cooking Demonstrations for Gastronomy Tourism Development in Sri Lanka: The Case of Galle District, Sri Lanka

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A B S T R A C T

Gastronomy has always been linked with the tourism experience. However, it can be seen that this link between tourism and gastronomy is developing towards quite new tourism products. Gastronomy tourism is a result of this growth, which enables the tourists to indulge themselves with the food culture of the places they visit. During the past few years, traditional cooking demonstrations were initiated by individuals or families in Galle as small and medium scale enterprises. These cooking classes are rapidly gaining fame among international tourists and play a prominent role in the tourism sector now. This study was carried out to examine the nature and significance of these particular SMEs and to examine how their contribution can be expanded further for the development of Gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka. The qualitative approach was followed as primary data were collected from owners of 10 cooking classes in the Galle district through semi-structured interviews and data was analyzed by using the content analysis method. Secondary data was gathered from reliable articles, websites, and books. The results of the study indicate that these ventures cater to the needs of guests through a good selection of local food items, proper demonstration of local ways of food preparation, and most importantly, making tourists actively participate in the cooking process and enabling them to experience Sri Lankan food culture first-hand.

Keywords: cooking demonstrations, gastronomy tourism, SMEs, traditional cuisine

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The expectations of contemporary tourists are far too varied when compared with the tourists of previous generations. When travelling, these contemporary tourists seek unique and authentic experiences which can be gained by travelling only to that particular destination. Even though food and beverage were forever presented in the tourism experience since its beginning, Gastronomy tourism is now considered a unique niche tourism type given the above-mentioned varied needs of modern tourists. Gastronomy tourism is based on the concept of knowing and learning, eating, tasting, and enjoying the gastronomic culture that is identified with a certain territory. Along with traditional, authentic, and innovative culinary experiences, gastronomy tourism also involves other activities, such as visiting the local food and beverage producers, participating in food-related events and festivals, and attending cooking classes (Lopez de Heredia & Gaztelumendi, 2020). This also makes the nature of Gastronomy tourism mainly appealing to foreign tourists rather than domestic tourists.

Cooking classes or traditional cooking demonstrations are where a tourist is given the overall knowledge about the ingredients used, how to find them from nearby places, food making styles, food presentation styles that are unique to the given region. Moreover, tourists can actively participate in the process of shopping at a local market to buy the ingredients and even prepare those dishes by themselves.

When Sri Lankan Tourism is concerned, there was no such thing called traditional cooking classes for tourists two decades ago. Foreign tourists were able to get the Sri Lankan culinary experience by staying with their local friends or maybe by dining local food and beverages at ethnic restaurants back then. However, during recent years by observing the rising enthusiasm of tourists to engage in the culinary experience, these traditional cooking classes were initiated as ventures in the main tourist regions in Sri Lanka. Galle, Kandy, and Habarana are some of them. These cooking classes are usually operated by individuals or by families as SMEs.

Galle being one of the major tourism regions of Sri Lanka caters to different kinds of tourists with its resources. The region is well known for its sandy beaches, the old Dutch fort, and now it is gaining its fame for traditional cooking classes as well.

However, gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka is in its introduction stage and could be developed further. The traditional cooking classes located in Galle District, therefore, are highly likely to contribute to gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka if they are given proper guidance and support. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of these outlets addressing aspects, such as their target market/target markets, product/products they offer, competitive advantage, their strengths and weaknesses, their contribution in financial terms and non-financial terms, etc.

1.2. Problem statement

UNWTO and BCC have very recently (2020) introduced guidelines for the development of Gastronomy tourism by identifying its importance. The purpose of this guide drawn up by UNWTO and BCC is to provide a set of practical tools for National Tourism Administrations (NTAs) and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) that wish to develop gastronomy tourism. This attempt of UNWTO clearly shows the increased interest in Gastronomy tourism as a niche tourism type. Especially at a time, in which UNWTO wishes

to support the NTAs and DMOs for the development of Gastronomy tourism, it would be quite beneficial to understand the role played by traditional cooking classes in Galle to support Gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka. In spite of this, almost no studies have been conducted so far to examine the same. A considerable amount of research is conducted to generally point out the importance of gastronomy in Sri Lanka Tourism, but attention has not been given to the cooking classes in particular. This creates a gap in the literature. As is mentioned in the guidelines for the development of gastronomy tourism (2020), identification of any gastronomy tourism products, locations, and venues that have special or differential value is a must when drafting a strategic plan for gastronomy tourism. Therefore, this study has been carried out to examine the nature and the present contribution of traditional cooking demonstrations of the Galle district, and to examine how the contribution can be expanded further for the development of gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka.

1.3. Research objectives

This research was mainly aimed at identifying the nature of traditional cooking classes in Galle, their contribution towards gastronomy tourism, the obstacles they currently face, and ways to improve the existing contribution. Moreover, it was also expected to present a SWOT analysis, which would help to have a clear picture of the current position of these ventures and to develop strategic planning.

1.4. Significance of the study

Fulfilling the objectives of this study helps to comprehend the role currently played by traditional cooking classes. Since no research has been conducted on these SMEs before, this study would help to fill the research gap, and thereby contribute to enriching the knowledge base. Moreover, it is very much essential to study further niche tourism types and promote them instead of being stuck with mainstream tourism products. Diversifying the tourism product is needed to meet the demands of changing leisure consumers and thrive in intense competition. Furthermore, the very first step in the process of developing Sri Lanka into a gastronomy destination is to have a proper understanding of the ventures and products that are already available in the given field.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gastronomy tourism

Since this research focuses on traditional cooking demonstrations, it is important to have a background idea about gastronomy tourism first. Gastronomy tourism is “a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. Along with authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomy tourism may also involve other related activities, such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals, and attending cooking classes. Eno-tourism (Wine Tourism), as a sub-type of gastronomy tourism, refers to tourism, the purpose of which is visiting vineyards, wineries, tasting, consuming and/or purchasing wine, often at or near the source” (“Gastronomy and Wine Tourism | UNWTO”, 2020). This definition implies that gastronomy tourism is about more than just dining. Dining is of course an essential tourist activity but gastronomy tourism incorporates the idea that tourists are more interested in learning and seeing how their meals are made, where they come from, and the cultural aspects involved with them. Authenticity thereby is a major concern in gastronomy tourism. UNWTO & BCC in their guidelines for the development of gastronomy tourism (2020), shows that even though the need to eat is the same for all human beings, it also differentiates us. Gastronomy tourism has arisen majorly due to this difference: the

difference between tourists who simply feed themselves during their travels and those for whom gastronomy has a decisive influence on their choice of destination and who wish to satisfy their hedonistic and cultural appetite in addition to their physiological need to eat.

It is almost impossible to talk about gastronomy tourism without talking about the culinary identity of the *terroir* as a distinguishing component. The territory is the backbone of gastronomy because a destination's landscapes, culture, raw material, techniques, and dishes define its culinary identity and are the foundation of, and should be part of, the DNA of the tourism experiences offered to visitors (Lopez de Heredia & Gaztelumendi, 2020). This nature justifies the varied nature of culinary identities all around the world and even in one country.

In a nutshell, food has become an essential inducement for differentiating tourism destinations and making them attractive, and gastronomy tourism has become a market segment in itself. It is also believed now that gastronomy tourism can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in destinations and there is a huge opportunity for developing this contribution in areas, such as rural development, economic growth, job creation, or responsible consumption and production (Lopez de Heredia & Gaztelumendi, 2020).

2.2. Elements for analyzing a destination's resources & products related to gastronomy

As it is mentioned in the problem statement of this study, a destination should first evaluate the internal capabilities it has in terms of gastronomy tourism. Basque Culinary Centre has come up with a checklist to serve this purpose. According to BCC, the key elements for analysing a destination's gastronomy related resources and products are its gastronomy heritage, gastronomy products and producers, food industries, and hospitality sector (restaurants, bars, accommodation establishments, etc.), Firms providing gastronomic activities: Destination Management Companies (DMC), cookery schools, etc.; specialist trade: markets, shops; venues for gastronomic education: museums, centres, etc.; trade fairs, festivals, and gastronomic events; and finally research and training centers: gastronomic universities, catering schools, and training centers, etc. Lopez de Heredia & Gaztelumendi (2020) also state that a key step for the development and management of gastronomy tourism in a territory is to identify, inventory, and analyse the potential and degree of development of the various elements in the value chain of gastronomy tourism. These factors justify the key objectives of this research which is to have an understanding of the contribution extended by traditional cooking classes towards the development of gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka.

2.3. Criteria for analyzing the ventures related to gastronomy tourism

Lopez de Heredia and Gaztelumendi (2020) highlight some of the criteria to analyse gastronomy-related ventures in a destination. Analysis of marketing strategies is one of those. Profiling the gastronomy tourist or identifying the target market is a major concern. Profiling the gastronomy tourist can be done by focusing on their generating country, expenditure on the gastronomy products, number of tourist arrivals, degree of knowledge on different food cultures, and connectivity with the experience. Furthermore, pricing strategies including their considerations when setting the price should be paid attention to. The intermediaries they work with, such DMCs, and considerations on selecting a physical location for the venture should also be considered. Moreover, promotional media, especially the website, presence on

social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), video networks (YouTube), and photograph networks (Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, etc.), publications, audio-visual products, and tourism leaflets should be taken into consideration. Therefore, the researchers of this study developed the research tools according to the above criteria provided by UNWTO & BCC.

2.4. Cooking demonstration (cooking classes) and traditional cuisine

Cooking classes cater to tourists are not only seen in Sri Lanka. It has become a worldwide trend during the past few years. Sharples (2003) describes the cooking school as "an interesting culinary phenomenon whose market appears to be expanding year by year". Traditional cuisine or local food can be defined as "not only about locally grown produce but should also include food that requires raw material from outside the area, but that is processed locally and thereby given a local or regional identity" (Nummedal & Hall, 2006). Sim (2009) described that "local food products can enhance the visitor experience by connecting the consumers to the region and its perceived culture and heritage". Some other studies also reveal that when tourists engage with the authentic meal experience at a cooking class and consume local foods, it can help them better understand the given territory's cultural identity, traditions, and ethnicity (Frochot, 2003; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010).

Some of the findings of previous research point out prominent reasons for the growing demand for cooking classes. As it is mentioned in the introduction of this study, Gilmore and Pine (2007) also argue that nowadays, an increasing number of tourists are craving authentic experiences. This could be one of the explanations as to why tourists are interested in attending cooking demonstrations. According to Henderson (2004), the authenticity and uniqueness of traditional foods are appealing for many tourists, and taking cooking classes is regarded as a form of cultural tourism. Kivela and Crotts (2006) have found that not only consumption but also the preparation, cooking, and even viewing of local dishes can attract tourists to a destination. Everett (2012) has discovered that part of the consumption that tourists enjoy when engaging in culinary tourism is hands-on experiences, such as attending a cooking school. Findings from another study regarding participation in cooking schools show that by getting a glimpse into someone else's kitchen techniques, as well as their lifestyle, tourists can have a more complete experience of the local culture (Horng & Tsai, 2010). Sharples (2003) defines cooking class as a product that often has several dimensions; namely, a rural dimension, a cultural dimension, an educational dimension, and the special interest dimension.

The Rural Dimension refers to the geographical location of the cooking schools. Most of the cooking classes take place in attractive, rural locations. Food is undoubtedly the key element, but to give a sense of authenticity the physical location is just as important (Molz, 2004). *The Cultural Dimension* relates to cultural identity. Food is an important element for experiencing culture (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). *The Educational Dimension* refers to the learning element. By taking cooking classes tourists can learn about different cuisines, new techniques, and try new dishes (Molz, 2007). Some tourists may bring home experiences from the cooking school to impress others, share their knowledge, use it on a day-to-day basis. UNWTO and BCC (2020) also mentions it is essential to designing knowledge-based value for tourists or to acquire detailed knowledge of the main attributes tourists look for and the values associated with them in order to enhance value in gastronomy tourism today and in the future. *The Special Interest Dimension*, which consists of people with a strong hobby, passion for food (Hall & Mitchell, 2001). Getz et al. (2014) have described this group of people as 'foodies'. A foodie is "a food lover, one whose personal and

social identity encompasses food quality, cooking, sharing meals and food experiences". Most of the time, these foodies prepare bucket lists of gastronomy experiences that they dream of having one day.

The cooking classes are usually organized in hotels and resorts, but some can be found at the private home of a local host, where their domestic space is used as a facility to host cooking lessons (Bell, 2015). The cooking classes facilitated by resorts or hotels are usually more expensive (Horng & Tsai, 2010), hence cooking classes at private homes are becoming more appealing to many nowadays. At local homes, tourists learn more than just cooking, the experience allows them to observe, experience, and learn the local way of life (McIntosh, Lynch, & Sweeney, 2011).

2.5. Sri Lankan traditional cuisine

The archaeological records of the country provide evidence about the richness of Sri Lankan food culture since ancient times ("Sri Lankan food culture", 2021). Throughout history, contact with foreign traders, years of colonization, and a multicultural population has developed Sri Lankan food culture into a unique culinary heritage (Fernando, 2019). Sri Lankan food culture is also influenced by its climate, diverse topography, and the availability of various fruits and vegetables, etc. Rice, other different cereals, leaves, vegetables, seafood items, meat items especially poultry items, eggs, different types of gruel, and confectionary items are the most consumed food varieties of Sri Lanka. The beauty of the traditional cuisine of Sri Lanka is that its strong linkage with the 'Hela Vedakama' (indigenous medicinal practices). The natives of the country inherit a generational knowledge on the different qualities of food varieties and different ways of preparing them considering the health conditions.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, despite being a small island nation, Sri Lanka has regional cuisines with unique tastes and aromas depending on whether they are originated from the North, South, West, East, or the hill country (Fernando, 2019). Dishes from the Southern part of Sri Lanka can be spicy, hot, or mild. The meals of the Southern region are well known for their variety. Ambulthiyal is a unique spicy fish preparation with thick gamboges "Goraka" paste (Lakpura, 2021). A study conducted by Perera and Wijesundara (2020) on the South Coast of Sri Lanka suggests that gastronomy can be used as a post-disaster recovery marketing tool for Sri Lanka tourism promotion.

Even though Sri Lankan cuisine is yet to make its fingerprint globally, Sri Lankan traditional cuisine is now being recognized among the international communities distinctively. Recently, BBC's Good Food ranked Sri Lankan cuisine as the top food trend for 2019 (Fernando, 2019). This increasing recognition creates an opportunity for the development of gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka.

2.6. Small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) in the Southern part of Sri Lanka

In the context of developing countries, SMEs are the lifeblood of the travel and tourism industry and strongly influence the development of a region (Erkkila 2004). The expansion of the tourism sector mainly relies on small and medium-sized enterprises existing in various related sectors. The development of tourism depends on SMEs to fulfill the expectations of tourists (Mastura and Siti 2011). With tourism development, the host community has the

advantage to offer services or sell products to local and foreign tourists (Dickman 1992; Rogerson 2004).

Deshapriya and Nawarathna (2020) have carried out a study to identify the performance of tourism SMEs in coastal tourist destinations in Southern Sri Lanka. The survey has recognized hotels and homestays; spas and Ayurveda; cafes, food, and beverages; traveling and guiding; surfing and diving; and souvenirs and handicrafts as common business types of tourism-related SMEs. Food and beverages accounted for 14.53% of the total tourism-related SMEs in the Southern Coast. The researchers have found out that the average profit of tourism-related SMEs is considerably higher than both the average profit of non-tourism-related SMEs and the average profit of the entire sample of SMEs. However, the education level of tourism-related SMEs' owners is slightly lower than that of non-tourism-related SMEs' owners.

3. Methodology

The type of research which has been used was qualitative. Qualitative methods are believed to provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires. The population of this study was considered to be the owners of all the traditional cooking classes located in the Galle district. However, there are no directories or documents that the researchers could use to decide upon the actual total number of outlets available in the given region. Therefore, a sample of 10 owners was selected using the convenient sampling technique by referring to the details available on TripAdvisor. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with the owners of selected cooking classes located in the Galle district. Interviews are the most appropriate when little is known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill et al., 2008). Due to the safety concerns in a period of a pandemic, these semi-structured interviews were conducted as a telephone conversation or video conferencing.

It was also required to gather data about the tourists who visit these outlets, such as their generating country, expenditure on the gastronomy products, number of tourist arrivals, degree of knowledge on different food cultures, connectivity with the experience arrivals, and their level of satisfaction. Usually, this kind of data is extracted from the tourists themselves. However, researchers were not able to do the same due to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNWTO (2020), suggests that portals, such as TripAdvisor, La Fourchette, The Fork, etc., reports from market research institutes, interviews with business owners would be helpful to gather data on the aforementioned areas of tourists in this kind of a situation. Hence, those strategies were used as data collecting tools by the researchers of this study. Secondary data was collected from reliable books, journal articles, websites, videos, etc. For data analysis, thematic content analysis was used as it is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff, 2005).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Nature of the traditional cooking demonstrations in Galle

The nature of these cooking classes was understood through the traceable history of this specific type of business, their vision, factors that drove the owners to start and continue the

business, products offered and physical evidence used, operating times, target market, prices, their physical location and intermediaries, promotional techniques and ownership, etc.

Given the details provided by respondents, researchers could see that the history of these particular types of ventures in Galle goes back to around 2003. This marks nearly 18 years since the very first cooking demonstrations classes were initiated as a separate business type. Two ladies named Karuna and Malani can be considered as the pioneers of this sector. These two ladies have been operating two separate entities in Unawatuna and at Galle Fort respectively since then. In the beginning, only these two ventures were there, but during the past 5-7 years, new businesses of the same category started coming up, most probably taking the example of the above-mentioned two ladies.

When asked about the purposes of starting up and continuing a venture like this, all the respondents said that they see it as an ideal way of earning a sound income. It was also revealed that the accelerating demand of tourists towards this kind of activities and owners' previous experiences related to foreign tourists drove them towards this particular business. Some of the owners were motivated by foreign tourists themselves to start up these outlets after those tourists enjoyed meals prepared by these owners at their restaurants long before. So those tourists have suggested that these people start cooking demonstrations. During the interviews, the researchers noted that only a few owners had a clear vision to present authentic Sri Lankan culture to the world through their venture. Chef Sampath, the owner of 'Sri Lanka Cooking Demonstration in Galle' and a former employee at several well-known hotels in down South seemed to have a good insight about giving tourists a memorable food experience which they can recall after returning home. Mr. Sudesh Gamage, the owner of 'Galle Unawatuna Cooking class by AGS' also conveyed similar thoughts when asked about his vision. Likewise, few of the owners have thought about creating a good image for Sri Lanka in addition to their personal purposes. The rest of them were just following the demand.

Where the operating procedure of a cooking class is concerned, the potential clients have to make a prior booking for a demonstration session first. This could be done via DMCs, TripAdvisor, or directly contacting the owners. A maximum of 15 people can be accommodated in one session. Even though these classes are not large-scale businesses, they still get a considerable number of bookings. Therefore, just walking into a class when you want is not possible with them. A client has to book a session at least 48 hours before their arrival at the class. If one needs to cancel their booking, it should also be informed at least 24 hours in advance.

Almost all the units in the selected sample claimed to provide a similar type of product including few differentiating factors in some. The main product is offered as a package. This package comprises two phases of services. One is a market tour in which the guest is taken to the nearest local market by tuk-tuk to purchase meat, fish, vegetables, spices, and herbs. Here in Galle, the majority of the ventures take their clients to fishing boats in Galle's fish market and let the clients pick the fish they prefer. Guests also get the opportunity of visiting the local vegetable market and thereby participate in picking vegetables they are going to prepare for the meal. The service providers make sure to purchase locally grown green varieties the most so that the guest is able to gain an authentic experience. They are taken to purchase the local spices as well. The foreign guests are able to see where the food comes from and see how the food here varies from their home. This market tour gives the

foreign tourists a glimpse of the day-to-day life of the host community. It draws them closer to the local culture. However, it should also be noted that there are some guests who would request to skip this market tour. According to the respondents, it is a limited number though. Some of the cooking classes in the sample also own home gardens. So, the guests get the opportunity to walk through these little farms and pick vegetables and greens themselves.

The other service included in this package is the demonstration. During the food preparation demonstration, clients are taught the most basics of traditional cuisine in Sri Lanka. Especially the inherent cooking tactics embedded with Sri Lankan culture are taught to the participants. These techniques include things as breaking a coconut, scaping it, getting the milk out of it, and finally adding them to curries as needed. Marinating meat with spices, tempering, and deep-frying vegetables are some of the other traditional cooking techniques that the guests can experience. The majority of the members in the sample prepare 8-10 dishes with the clients. These dishes include rice, meat, fish, vegetables and greens, and papadam. Demonstrators show how to prepare these dishes but most importantly guests are encouraged to follow the example of demonstrators and engage in the food preparation process. Finally, guests could enjoy the meal prepared by them.

It takes nearly 4-5 hours to complete this entire experience. Even though these cooking classes are conducted in the morning and evening both, clients are encouraged to participate in morning classes as one can get a thorough knowledge about the local market and can purchase fresh fish and veggies when they are visited in the morning. The typical schedule of a cooking class is mentioned below, 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. – welcome and introduction to the class, 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m – market visit by a tuk-tuk and/or farm walk, 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. – return to the outlet by tuk-tuk, meal preparation and demonstration and 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. – lunch and souvenir presentation.

Apart from these two phases of service, there are other products offered by these ventures too. One is the welcome drink made from local ingredients. Even though serving a welcome drink is a usual thing in any hospitality organization, what matters here is their effort to make it a symbol of local culture. All the respondents claimed to serve king coconut water, 'beli mal' which is a herbal beverage made with sun-dried bael flowers boiled in water and low-grown Ceylon tea, etc. Among the members of the sample, 'Sri Lanka Cookery Demonstration in Galle' provides an innovative traditional drink as the welcome drink which is made out of curry leaves, coconut juice, and lime juice.

Furthermore, the kitchen's architecture and the utensils are also a part of the product. These can be considered as the physical evidence of the service offered as well. The majority of the respondents in the sample said that their kitchens are built following the rural architecture. These kitchens are mostly made of mud and straw. When these kitchens are made, a framework of poles is sunk into the ground, with reed placed horizontally between the poles to make mat-like screens. The spaces between the exterior and interior walls are then filled with mud. Both sides of these walls are then plastered with a wet mud mixture. The use of natural clay and thatched roof perfectly fits the hot tropical climate of Sri Lanka. When the weather is cool and humid, especially at night, the sponginess of the clay absorbs moisture and during the day, when it is warm, the moisture is pushed out. Therefore, the walls of these houses act as a natural "air conditioner", which prevents heat from crossing the walls. The roof covering is usually Cadjan (woven coconut palms), grass such as Illuk, or sometimes a combination of all these materials. Wooden doors are also used. Moreover, even

utensils like clay cooking pots, wooden burners, clay plates, lotus leaves, clay cups, mortar and pestle (wangediya and mol gaha in native language), winnower (kulla) and grinding stone (miris gala) are used to complete the picture of a typical Sri Lankan rural kitchen. However, it was also revealed that there were some units in the sample that do not completely practice this method. Those are more like local cooking experiences in a modern kitchen. However, in general, it could be observed that the majority of the venture owners were aware of the importance of promoting the 'rural aspect' in order to deliver a memorable and authentic product.

Another product offered by only a few ventures is the printed recipe books to be taken by guests so that they can use them when they go home and try out Sri Lankan dishes. 'Galle Unawatuna Cooking class by AGS' flows with modern technology and sends their guests the recipes in PDF format via WhatsApp, Viber or email, etc. The owner of 'Galle Unawatuna Cooking class by AGS', Mr. Sudesh believes that providing a soft copy like that is convenient and durable as some guests tend to misplace the printed versions.

A limited number of these cooking classes also present a printed certificate for the guests who took part in the demonstrations. Most of the tourists who take part in this particular tourism activity are 'foodies' and culinarians who travel to various destinations to engage with the local food culture of the places visited. Therefore, presenting a certificate actually helps to increase their satisfaction too. This lobbies the idea of fulfilling the self-esteem needs of a person as pointed out in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Giving away a certificate caters to the need for recognition and status easily. Moreover, some ventures among them also distribute gift packages to the participants which consist of local spices.

Another special feature that should be highlighted under the product is 'after-sales service'. Many venture owners in the selected sample revealed that they provide after-sales service to their clients. When a tourist completes this cooking demonstration experience in Galle and returns home, they try to prepare those Sri Lankan dishes once in a while. Respondents said that it is a frequent thing to get calls from these clients when they need guidance and clarification over a dish they learned about or the dishes mentioned in the recipe book provided. In this way, these cooking classes provide answers and guidance to those clients which is after-sales service. After-sales service undoubtedly plays an important role in customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth. It generates loyal customers and increases brand value.

If one closely analyses all the products described above, it can be said that those are more focused on educational experience. Because during the whole experience and even after returning home, these cooking classes educate their clients about Sri Lankan culture and its cuisine.

Another criterion to examine the nature of these cooking classes is their target market. Only two owners said that they have decided upon the target market/markets. When asked about the target market, these two respondents revealed that they want to attract 'foodies' from European and other Western countries. All the others did not seem to have the knowledge about selecting a target market. These people do not intentionally promote their product to a specific market, though their major clientele is the again the foodies mostly from countries like England, France, Netherlands, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, etc.

The pricing strategies of these selected samples were also studied by the researchers. Classes are normally conducted as common sessions including few separate guests at once, but if the clients insist on private sessions for couples or families, those can also be arranged at a slightly higher price. According to the details gathered from the sample, it can be observed that the price ranges from 25 USD to 70 USD per person for one session. However, only one cooking class among them charges 70 USD. When asked about the reason for this higher rate, the owner justified this price by saying they provide a unique and innovative experience for their guests and they consider the special requirements of each guest. The rate of all other classes falls between 25-45 USD per person. This price includes all the facilities provided, such the transportation by tuk-tuk, all the food and beverage items, and even recipe books. No additional or hidden charges are included in the given final price, but the clients are free to tip the service providers depending on their satisfaction. It can be said that these ventures set the price considering the cost and they also stick with the market price. Some of these cooking classes get the full payment from the guests prior to their arrival, some get an advance payment, while the rest only gets the payment on arrival.

Physical location and intermediaries also indicate the nature of traditional cooking demonstrations in Galle. When it comes to the physical location, all the owners highlighted the importance of locating the cooking class in a somewhat remote place. They believe that a village setting would be more advantageous and attractive to the clients. These ventures are located at least 3-4 km away from the urban setting. From the selected sample, only one cooking class was located inside the old Dutch fort. Even though the owners preferred locating at exotic places, they also make sure not to be too far from the local markets. This way, they balance both the easy accessibility and richness of the experience. Another key characteristic that could be observed was that some of the owners locate these outlets as separate units at their own homes. When intermediaries are concerned, all the participants of the sample are affiliated with TripAdvisor. Some of these cooking classes team up with DMCs like Reddot Tours, Aitken Spence, and Jetwing, while some hotels nearby also direct their clients as well.

Promotional tactics used were also examined by the researchers. Social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube are the most used promotional methods. There were three members of the samples who do not engage in any sort of promotional techniques claiming that they get an adequate number of clients to cover the targets. It could be generally observed that the owners of given cooking classes do not put extra effort into promotions. They believe word-of-mouth is a stronger promotional tool than any other tool.

Identifying the characteristics of ownership, management, and the sources of funding the venture was also helpful to comprehend the nature of cooking demonstration classes in Galle. Except for two members of the selected sample, all the others were females. The majority of these owners solely own the venture and employ 1-7 staff for support. Some owners do the service-providing part as well. In these kinds of organizations, only 1 person handles all the tasks. This indicates one characteristic of SMEs. The majority of the owners do not possess a sound educational background but most importantly they have long-term experience in tourism in different ways.

Two members of the sample have got financial support from foreigners to start the business, while others have started their business from personal funds.

4.2. Contribution of traditional cooking classes towards the development of gastronomy tourism

One special characteristic about gastronomy tourists is that they travel year-round. When asked about the number of bookings during both tourism peak and off-peak, it was revealed that tourists come to their demonstrations year-around. Somehow, they get flooded with inquiries during the highest peak months like August (due to Esala Perahera – Kandy), November, December, and January. During the peak months, many of them get at least bookings for 2 groups consisting of 2 – 12 persons each day all the 30 days of the month. It was found that these classes have a sound and increasing demand. There are many repeat visitors among them who visit these classes each year. Most importantly, some tourists participate in these classes for several days during their stay at Galle, which means that if they participate in a class one day, they come again on the following days too. These types of guests can be clearly identified as gastronomy tourists. When it comes to the spending patterns of the given clientele, they cannot be considered as spendthrifts. Most of the respondents said that their clients rarely bargain on the given rate. What these tourists seek is value for money, which means if the ventures provide a fulfilling memorable experience, guests happily and willingly pay higher amounts. When it comes to the satisfaction of guests, researchers could get an idea about the same after analysing the reviews on TripAdvisor. It could be noticed that guests were quite satisfied with the service given by the establishments in the sample. They have written these reviews in the form of recommending the classes to people who would like to learn Sri Lankan cuisine. Moreover, many clients have written that the class they visited is an ideal place to learn about native culture and its many aspects.

4.3. Obstacles faced by owners of the traditional cooking classes in Galle

Table 1: SWOT Analysis for Traditional Cooking Classes in Galle

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique food culture • Availability of rural aspect • Availability of local markets • Experience in local FnB and tourism industry • Positive reviews from clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of recognition from SLTDA • Owners' lack of knowledge on management practices • Owners' lack of knowledge on selecting a target market • Lack of knowledge on differentiation • Lack of a proper vision
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing Demand for gastronomy tourism • UNWTO's current attention towards the development of gastronomy tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of COVID-19 at the moment • Other competitors who provide low-quality products for lower prices

Source: Developed by the researchers referring to primary and secondary data

Other than the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a major issue faced by this niche sector is the lack of recognition and support from Sri Lanka Tourism state organizations.

There is no separate category for them to get registered or to obtain certification the way many other businesses like hotels and restaurants do. Therefore, despite the significant role played by these ventures, they do not have proper recognition and support. When regional meetings regarding tourism are called, these ventures are always missed out. Another issue highlighted by the respondents was the increasing number of low-quality businesses of the same category which can ultimately badly affect Sri Lanka in the process of becoming a good gastronomy destination.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that Galle district has a considerable number of traditional cooking demonstration classes to cater to gastronomy tourists. The history of these ventures goes back 18 years when two ladies started two separate classes. After that, recently many classes have come up. The major products of these classes are the market tour, food preparation demonstration, meals, utilities used, architecture and interior of the outlet, recipe books, certificates, and after-sales explanations. These ventures are mostly located in rural areas but with easy access to local markets. The normal price range is 25-45 USD per person for one session. A session lasts for nearly 4-5 hours and is mostly conducted in the morning. Potential clients have to book a session at least 48 hours prior to their visit and that can be done by DMCs, TripAdvisor, nearby hotels, or directly. Common social media platforms are used for promotions even though word-of-mouth is their most reliable tactic. Sole proprietorship can be seen where ownership is considered and a very limited number of people are employed as staff. They get repeat gastronomy visitors each year, especially from countries like England, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, and other western countries, while a considerable number of clients from Eastern countries too. These tourists are food lovers who travel year-round and they would like to spend a higher amount on worthwhile gastronomy experiences. They generate good demand for the demonstrations. Their satisfaction level is sound and they do recommend other food lovers around the world to visit these classes to get an authentic experience of Sri Lankan Cuisine and other cultural aspects. The major issue these ventures face is the lack of recognition and support from tourism-related state organizations. Other cooking classes that provide lower prices for unauthentic experiences are also an issue this specific sector faces.

5.1. Recommendations

It is highly recommended for SLTDA to conduct a survey or a census to identify the number of cooking classes available in the Galle District. It is also recommended to increase the recognition by introducing a registration procedure. The ideal thing would be to generate a separate category for the same. This way, Sri Lanka tourism can maintain a directory of the available ventures related to gastronomy. Moreover, introducing rules and regulations to maintain the quality of this small sector is quite important. Many other special types of tourism ventures like spice gardens also have these specific standards to follow. The increasing number of low-quality products can be minimized through this. Conducting workshops for the owners and employees of these classes is highly likely to minimize the weaknesses pointed out in the SWOT analysis. Knowledge of basic management practices, marketing tactics, and new trends in gastronomy can be disseminated through these workshops. Increasing the participation of the host community in the decision-making process is a vital factor in sustainable development. Therefore, making the owners of these cooking classes participate in the regional tourism meetings would help them to share their valuable experience and thereby lead to making effective decisions on gastronomy tourism.

Finally, it is recommended to support this sector through government incentives as these businesses silently contribute to support gastronomy tourism in Sri Lanka.

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