

Malaysian Heritage Food: Tourist Perception on Food Culture, Knowledge, and Lifestyle in Tioman and Perhentian Island

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian culinary traditions, passed down through generations, have contributed to the global recognition of MHF as a distinctive cuisine. However, the similarities between Malaysian food and that of neighbouring countries underscore the need to strengthen and preserve a culinary identity that is both idealistic and uniquely Malaysian. Nowadays, Malaysian Heritage Food facing modernization and having significant problems maintaining its authentic cultural values. This study examines the relationship between food culture, lifestyle, and tourists' knowledge in shaping perceptions of MHF in Tioman and Perhentian Islands. Application of quantitative methodology, data sampling was collected via online survey. Random and purposive sampling method yield 351 respondents. Pearson correlation reveal that tourists' knowledge and lifestyle have strong positive correlations towards perceptions of MHF. Whereas food culture shows a weak and insignificant relationship towards perception of MHF. These results suggest that while cultural heritage remains important, knowledge transmission and lifestyle practices play a more decisive role in sustaining MHF's appeal. The study highlights the need for educational initiatives, culinary tourism strategies, and policy measures to strengthen the preservation and promotion of MHF in the face of globalization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being a multi-ethnic country, Malaysia has positioned itself well as a food paradise. This label is by no means a coincidence; rather, it is due to the synergistic effect created by the mixing of the various ethnic groups. Moreover, the country is enriched by the culinary heritage it shares with neighbouring countries and regions. Amidst rapid modernization, the country still manages to hold on to its proud heritage. Therefore, Malaysia is one of the few places where you can find a fusion of flavors and variations of traditional cuisine, which is living proof of the famous motto Malaysia, Truly Asia (Raji et al., 2017).

Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) showcases three different food cultures and cooking methods that are rooted in the combination of the three main races in Malaysia (Omar & Omar, 2018). The food, language, and clothing of the Peranakan Chinese have been greatly influenced by Malaysian culture through intermarriage and cultural adaptation and can be said to be the most famous and memorable of the unique ethnic and cultural mix in Peninsular Malaysia. The proposal of ethnic and cultural unity that is typical in Peninsular Malaysia, the cuisine, language, and fashion of the Chinese people of Peranakan descent have been greatly influenced by Malaysian culture through intermarriage and cultural adaptation (Duruz et al. 2015). Ahmad Shariff et al. (2024) also stated that Malaysia is a foodie's paradise, and most Malaysians enjoy the country's rich culinary traditions and cultural diversity.

The food culture in Malaysia is different from other countries and it has its own secrets. The secret of the uniqueness of Malay cuisine lies in the use of herbs and spices combined with traditional equipment and special cooking methods. In the past, ingredients were mostly obtained from gardens and forests, making Malay cuisine a unique culinary experience (Raji et al., 2017). According to Malay customs, men are the heads of the household and family, while women are housewives who focus on household duties including cooking, cleaning, and looking after children. Knowledge of making food heritage can be done through word of mouth, hands-on activities, observation, and by eating food that has been taught by the old generation to the young to eat only (Sharif et al. 2016).

Although Malaysia's culinary traditions are a potential attraction for both local and international tourists, challenges remain in safeguarding the originality and authenticity of MHF (Omar et al., 2015; Rashid, 2021). Global influences, acculturation, and similarities with neighbouring cuisines often blur the distinctiveness of Malaysian food, leading to misconceptions among tourists. Furthermore, research on how food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge shape tourists' perceptions of MHF remains limited. This gap restricts efforts to design effective strategies for preserving and promoting heritage food in Malaysia's tourism sector. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between food culture, lifestyle, and tourists' knowledge in shaping perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether these factors influence the way tourists perceive the authenticity and value of MHF in the context of two popular island destinations, which is Tioman and Perhentian.

1.1 Research questions

To address this purpose, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) What is the relationship between food culture and tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food?
- b) How does lifestyle influence tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food?
- c) To what extent does knowledge affect tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food?

1.2 Research objectives

This study is to determine the Malaysian Heritage Food toward tourist perception on food culture, tradition, and lifestyle. The objectives are followed:

- a) To determine the relationship between food culture and tourists' perception towards Malaysian Heritage Food
- b) To determine the relationship between lifestyle and tourists' perception towards Malaysian Heritage Food
- c) To determine the relationship between knowledge and tourists' perception towards Malaysian Heritage Food

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Malaysian heritage food

Heritage represents the cultural legacy of past generations that is preserved and transmitted over time. In the culinary context, heritage food embodies cultural identity, social practices, and intergenerational knowledge that shape both local and tourist experiences (Barghi, 2017; Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) reflects the nation's multicultural identity, drawing from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous influences while incorporating elements of Arab, Siamese, and Portuguese cuisines (Raji et al., 2017; Perry, 2017). This cultural blending has produced iconic dishes such as *nasi lemak*, *rendang*, and *laksa*, which serve as culinary symbols of the nation (Ahmad Shariff et al., 2024).

Malaysia's cultural heritage is original, unique, and colorful with a variety of local cuisines from various races and ethnicities (Ishak et al., 2021; Perry, 2017). From the definition, MHF is the national dish of Malaysia that represents the way of life, culture, and tradition of a multi-racial society (Omar & Omar, 2018). Malaysians are united in appreciating the country's ethnic food, despite differences in belief, culture, and religion. Food plays an important role in uniting Malaysians and learning each other's culture and traditions but can be a source of ethnic strife and conflict (Perry, 2017). The Malaysian region is famous for its special dishes such as beef rendang, laksa, nasi lemak, and tapai. Indeed, Malay food is the same in terms of spices which is proven in preparation, cooking methods, and the availability and use of important ingredients such as herbs and natural spices (Raji et al., 2017). Scovazzi (2019) describes cultural heritage as "tangible and intangible heritage of a group or society inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and endowed for the benefit of future generations" (Lenzerini, 2011).

Recent studies emphasize two key dimensions of heritage food authenticity and safety as critical for sustaining its cultural and tourism value (Almansouri et al., 2025). However, MHF faces challenges due to globalization and modernization. The hybridization of cuisine and similarities with neighbouring countries often blur its distinctiveness, leading to contested claims of origin and confusion among tourists (Rashid, 2021). These issues highlight the importance of safeguarding authenticity while leveraging MHF as a cultural tourism asset.

2.2 Food culture

Food culture refers to habits, rituals, practices, belief systems, values, lifestyles, traditions, and customs related to the cultivation, production, procurement, cooking, eating, serving, and celebrating of food. Family history, ancestry, heritage, and ethnicity, as well as geographic disparities, climate, and social and political events such as poverty and conflict, all have a significant impact on food culture. Individuals or small networks and organizations, such as families, impact food culture, as well as larger ones, such as communities, businesses, and nations. Although a lot has changed

politically, socially, and culturally in Malaysia since independence, one thing that hasn't changed in 60 years is Malaysians' obsession with food (Soon & Lazaroo, 2017). The secret of the specialty of Malay cuisine lies in the use of herbs and spices combined with traditional equipment and special cooking methods. In the past, ingredients were mostly obtained from gardens and forests, making Malay cuisine a unique culinary experience (Raji et al., 2017).

According to Perry (2017), Malaysian cuisine is a dish from various ethnic and cultural groups that have lived and continue to live in Malaysia, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. Although these cultural communities are proud of their traditional cuisine and maintain their culinary heritage and traditions, they have evolved and adapted to the Malaysian environment by adding new and delicious dishes to the community's existing traditional cuisine (Perry, 2017). For example, Malay-Chinese and Malay-Indian cuisines contain flavours and dishes that are unique to Malaysia and are not found in China or India, where the ethnic communities are from.

More recent scholarship has shown that food culture is increasingly commercialized through tourism, sometimes at the expense of authenticity (Everett, 2016). Tourists may value variety and novelty, but without deeper cultural engagement such as food heritage storytelling or immersive experiences the cultural meaning behind MHF may be diluted (Ng & Karim, 2016). Thus, while food culture remains an important element of national identity, its ability to shape tourist perceptions depends on how effectively it is communicated and experienced.

2.3 Lifestyle

Lifestyle reflects daily habits, social practices, and values related to food, including dietary norms, preparation methods, and communal dining. Malay food traditions emphasize halal preparation, rice-based meals, and communal eating, practices that remain central to Malaysia's cultural identity (Francisco, 2012; Raji et al., 2017). These lifestyle elements are not static; they adapt to contemporary influences while retaining cultural significance.

According to Malay customs, men are the heads of the household and family, while women are housewives who focus on household duties including cooking, cleaning, and looking after children. In Malay society, women's duties are more related to knowledge, practices, and shared beliefs in their customs (Raji et al., 2017; Md. Nor, 2012). In the past, "Lesung batu" (mortar and pestle) and "batu giling" (stone hand grinder made of stone) were standard in Malay kitchens to prepare food. Compared to modern equipment such as blenders and food processors, it is believed that the use of stone mortars and millstones gives a unique taste to food. It is believed that the grinder only grinds the ingredients to a smooth texture but does not remove the oil and flavour of the ingredients as traditional stone mortars do. Almost all Malay main dishes are eaten with rice, which is also a common food in many other Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei, and the Philippines. As the state of Kedah produces almost half of all the rice consumed in Malaysia, it is also referred to as the country's "rice bowl" or "rice granary". According to Raji et al (2017), they stated that in Malay cuisine, Nasi Lemak (steamed rice with coconut milk and pandan leaves) is the most famous rice dish. Nasi Lemak is the food of the nation and is usually served for breakfast. It is a staple food for Malaysians. In addition, Malaysians often eat with their bare hands and in a polite manner (Francisco, 2012). They were also instructed to eat when they were hungry and stop when they were full. This is one of the teachings of Islam that has influenced the eating habits of Malaysian Muslims until now.

Recent research suggests that lifestyle-based practices are increasingly visible to tourists, who perceive them as markers of authenticity and cultural richness (Ishak et al., 2021). For example, the Malay custom of eating with hands or using traditional tools like the *lesung batu* (mortar and pestle) adds cultural depth to the dining experience. Such practices illustrate how lifestyle functions as a bridge between cultural heritage and tourism, reinforcing perceptions of authenticity and creating meaningful tourist experiences.

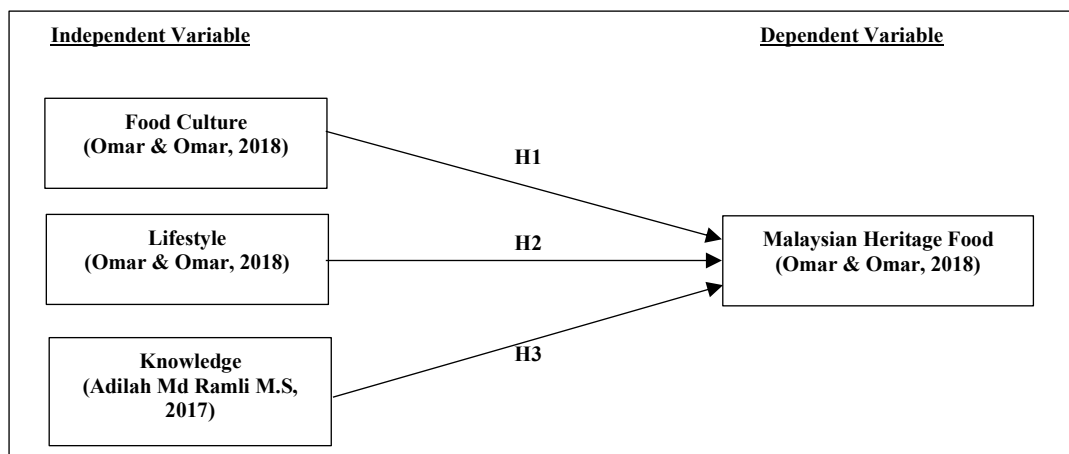
2.4 Knowledge

Knowledge plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting heritage food practices across generations. Traditionally, knowledge has been passed through oral transmission, observation, and practice within families (Sharif et al., 2016). However, modernization and the rise of convenience culture have disrupted this process, as younger generations increasingly rely on food delivery services rather than learning traditional recipes (Md Ramli, 2017).

At the same time, tourists' knowledge of MHF greatly influences their perceptions. Studies show that awareness of the cultural and historical significance of dishes enhances appreciation, whereas limited knowledge may lead to undervaluation (Kwik, 2008; Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). More recent research highlights the role of education, heritage branding, and digital storytelling in enhancing knowledge and engagement with culinary heritage (Ahmad Shariff et al., 2024). Thus, knowledge is both a preservation tool and a driver of positive tourist perceptions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 is the framework for the study of Malaysian Heritage Food: Tourist perception on food culture, knowledge, and lifestyle in Tioman and Perhentian Island.



3.1 Research framework and hypotheses

Drawing on the literature, this study proposes a framework examining the influence of food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge on tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF). These three independent variables were selected because they represent cultural identity, social practices, and intergenerational awareness—factors highlighted in prior research as critical for understanding heritage food consumption and tourism (Omar & Omar, 2018; Raji et al., 2017; Sharif et al., 2016).

Food culture encompasses culinary traditions, rituals, and social practices. While it reflects Malaysia's diverse heritage, earlier studies suggest that globalization and cultural overlap may weaken its distinctiveness and recognition among tourists (Omar et al., 2015; Rashid, 2021).

Lifestyle refers to food-related habits and customs, such as communal eating, halal preparation, and rice-based diets. Prior research highlights lifestyle as a key driver of cultural continuity and tourist appreciation (Raji et al., 2017; Francisco, 2012).

Knowledge represents awareness and understanding of food heritage, including preparation methods and historical significance. Knowledge transmission is vital to preserving authenticity and enhancing tourist perceptions (Sharif et al., 2016; Kwik, 2008). Based on these dimensions, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1: Food culture has a relationship with tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food.

H2: Lifestyle has a relationship with tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food.

H3: Knowledge has a relationship with tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food.

3.2 Research design and study area

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge in shaping tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF). According to the Seleyew (2020), the research design intended to provide an appropriate framework for the study. He also states that, a significant decision in the research design process is the choice to be made regarding the research approach since it determines how relevant information for the study were obtained. Quantitative methods were chosen because they allow for statistical testing of hypotheses, objective measurement of variables, and generalization of findings to a broader tourist population (Cavana et al., 2001). A structured survey was employed to collect data from tourists who had visited Tioman Island in Pahang and Perhentian Island in Terengganu, two popular destinations known for their natural beauty and cultural attractions.

Malaysia comprises more than 870 islands, among which Tioman and Perhentian are well-known for their unique blend of traditional village life and growing tourism activities. Tioman Island consists of eight villages, including Tekek, Juara, and Genting, where modern facilities remain limited and communities continue to preserve traditional ways of life. Local food practices are strongly influenced by available resources such as seafood and forest products, while festivals often include traditional hunting and cooking activities.

Perhentian Island, made up of Perhentian Besar and Perhentian Kecil, is equally distinctive for its fishing villages and small-scale tourism facilities. Kampung Nelayan serves as the administrative and social hub, housing a school, clinic, and police station. Tourists are attracted not only by the natural landscape but also by local dining experiences, ranging from simple village stalls to modest restaurants offering a variety of traditional dishes. Compared with urbanized destinations such as Langkawi and Penang, both Tioman and Perhentian retain an authentic village atmosphere, making them suitable contexts for exploring tourist perceptions of MHF.

By focusing on these two islands, the study provides insights into how tourists experience and evaluate heritage food in semi-rural, culturally rich environments where traditional food practices remain visible alongside modern influences.

3.3 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual tourist who has visited Tioman or Perhentian Island. Tourists were selected as the focus because their perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) provide valuable insights into how cultural practices, knowledge, and lifestyle influence culinary tourism experiences. By analysing individuals' responses, the study aims to capture diverse perspectives on heritage food consumption and appreciation.

3.4 Research sampling design

The target population consists of both local and international tourists who visited Tioman Island (Pahang) and Perhentian Island (Terengganu). These islands were chosen due to their popularity as tourist destinations and their ability to showcase authentic food practices within semi-rural communities. The initial target sample size was 400; however, after excluding incomplete or invalid responses, 351 usable questionnaires were retained for analysis.

A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure respondents had exposure to Malaysian cuisine during their visits. This method is commonly applied in heritage and cultural tourism studies where prior experience with the phenomenon of interest is necessary (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). Data collection took place over a period of two months through both online distribution and on-site engagement with tourists.

3.5 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the independent variables (food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge) and the dependent variable (tourists' perceptions of MHF). Items were adapted from prior studies to ensure content validity (Omar & Omar, 2018; Adibah Ramli, 2017). Each construct was assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire consisted of four main sections:

Table 1. Structure of the Questionnaire Instruments

Section	Description	Key Variables Measured
1. Demographic	Collected respondents' background characteristics.	Gender, age, education level, travel Frequency, state of origin
2. Food Culture	Assessed tourists' views on cultural identity, traditions, and culinary values	Perceptions of cultural representation, ancestral inheritance, culinary diversity, tourism appeal
3. Lifestyle	Examined dietary habits, communal practices, and food-related customs	Role of local food, rice-based diets, communal eating traditions and cultural practices
4. Knowledge	Evaluated awareness of heritage food preparation and cultural continuity	Familiarity with traditional cooking methods, equipment, recipes and intergenerational knowledge

3.6 Pre-test and pilot test

According to Bolarinwa (2015), the extent to which the instrument assesses or measures the interest structure in its entirety is related to the pre-test to assess content validity. For this study, the researchers consulted with two lecturers from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management at UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang's Campus Permatang Pauh, as well as industry professionals. According to Bolarinwa (2015), Cronbach's Alpha was used in the pilot test to assess the internal consistency or reliability of the questionnaire. Specifically, it was used to measure the extent to which the items within the questionnaire were measuring the same concept, indicating how well the instrument consistently measures what it is intended to measure. As a result, for this study, a pilot test was administered to 20 people that came to the Tioman island. The group of people that came under the program of their university. Apart from that, 10 people that came to Perhentian island also got collected data.

3.7 Data collection process

G-Power was utilized due to its reliability, flexibility, and user-friendly interface (Erdfelder et al., 1996). The analysis indicated that a minimum of 150 respondents is required to ensure accurate data results. Furthermore, the calculation was supported using the most recent version of IBM SPSS (v29) to validate the required sample size. The data were distributed through an online survey using a Google form. In this context, a browser survey was created. The use of this online survey to collect data on the relationship between food culture, knowledge, lifestyle, and tourists' preference towards Malaysian Heritage Food in Pulau Tioman. The questionnaire was created in Google Form and distributed at random through QR code and email through the tourist. The link to Google Form was also distributed via internet platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

Several analytical procedures were employed to address the study objectives and test the proposed hypotheses. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing an overview of the sample profile. Second, reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Third, correlation analysis (Pearson's r) was applied to examine the relationships between the independent variables (food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge) and the dependent variable (tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food). Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted to evaluate the strength and statistical significance of these relationships, thereby determining the extent to which the proposed framework was supported. This systematic approach ensured that the study's objectives were addressed with methodological rigor, providing valid and reliable insights into tourists' perceptions of MHF.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive analysis

Analysis of the descriptive variables of the respondents in this study about tourist perception towards food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge in Tioman and Perhentian island.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents about the preferences of tourists towards food culture, lifestyle and knowledge in the Malaysian Islands

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	185	52.7
Male	166	47.3
Age		
19-20	10	2.8
21-30	272	77.5
31-40	44	12.5
41 and above	21	6.0
Below 18	4	1.1
Occupation		
Government	37	10.5
Non-Government	147	41.9
Others	54	15.4
Students	113	32.2
Level of Study		
Degree	165	47.0
Diploma	89	25.4
Others	40	11.4
SPM	30	8.5
STPM	27	7.7
State of Origin		

Johor	35	10.0
Kedah	14	4.0
Kelantan	42	12.0
Negeri Sembilan	4	1.1
Pahang	42	12.0
Perak	8	2.3
Perlis	61	17.4
Pulau Pinang	20	5.7
Sabah	5	1.4
Sarawak	10	2.8
Selangor	45	12.8
Terengganu	23	6.6
Wilayah Persekutuan	28	8.0
Kuala Lumpur		
Others	7	2.0
Frequency of Travelling		
1-2 times	159	45.3
3-4 times	99	28.2
5-6 times	33	9.4
7-8 times	16	4.6
More than 8 times	44	12.5

Based on table 2, the results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents about the preferences of tourists towards food culture, lifestyle and knowledge in the Malaysian Islands. Respondents according to the majority were female as many as 185 (52.7%), while male respondents were as many as 166 (47.3%). In addition, the age of 21 -30 years is most respondents who answered this survey, which is a total of 272 respondents (77.5%), while from the age of 31 - 40 years, a total of 44 respondents answered this survey and made 12.5%. Respondents aged 41 and above are 21 (6.0%), while the age of 19 - 20 is 10 respondents (2.8%). The least number of respondents were under 18 with a total of 4 people (1.1%). Another demographic profile is the occupation of the respondents which shows the largest number of non-government workers which is 147 people (41.9%) followed by students with a total of 113 people (32.2%). As for the occupation government, it got the fewest surveys, 37 (10.5%) compared to others that got 54 respondents (15.4%). The majority of respondents who answered this survey were degree holders, namely 165 respondents (47.0%) followed by diploma holders, 89 respondents (25.4), other levels of study by 40 respondents (11.4%), SPM by 30 (8.5%) and STPM a total of 27 (7.7%). The state of Perlis recorded the highest record with a total of 61 respondents (17.4%), followed by Selangor with 45 (12.8%), while Kelantan and Pahang had the same number of 42 (12.0%). A total of 35 respondents (10.0%) for Johor, 28 respondents (8.0%) for the Wilayah Persekutuan of Kuala Lumpur. Terengganu received 23 respondents (6.6%), 20 respondents (5.7%) for the state of Penang, Kedah with 14 respondents (4.0%), Sarawak with 10 respondents (2.8%) followed by Perak with 8 (2.3%). Melaka and other (foreigner that stay long in Malaysia but not stay in one place) states recorded 7 respondents (2.0%). Sabah and Negeri Sembilan each got 5 respondents (1.4%) and 4 respondents (1.1%) Finally, the majority's travel frequency is 1 - 2 times which is 159 respondents (45.3%), then 3 - 4 times as many as 99 (28.2%), while 5 - 6 times is 33 (9.4%), then 7 - 8 times as many as 16 (4.6 %) and more than 8 times is 44 (12.5%).

4.2 Mean and standard deviation

Table 3: Food Culture and Tradition of Malay Heritage Food towards the people that are traveling to the Tioman and Perhentian Island

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
FCResemblesthecountryculture	351	6.2165	1.04409
	351	6.3048	.91399

FCInheritedfromtheancestor	351	6.3077	.96624
FCMalaysianculinarypalates	351	6.3761	1.01187
FCcanattracttourist	351		
Valid N (listwise)			

This analysis shows that the highest mean score on a Likert scale of 1 to 7 is "Can the Culture and Food Traditions of the community in Malaysia attract foreign tourists to visit this country?" where the total mean is 6.3761 (SD=1.01187), while the score the second highest mean is "Malaysian cuisine is recognized as consisting of a balance between all types of flavors and tastes: spicy, mild, sweet, sour and creamy from all different ethnic communities", the mean amounting to 6.3077 (SD=0.96624). "This eating culture is inherited from our ancestors either directly or indirectly from one generation to another" with a total mean of 6.3048 (SD=0.91399). Finally, "Malaysian food resembles culture, history and style unique life of the people of this country" mean score is 6.2165 (SD=1.04409).

Table 4: Lifestyle of Malay Heritage Food towards the people that are traveling to the Tioman and Perhentian Island

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
LlocalfoodplaymajorroleinMHF	351	6.4587	.80561
Lmalayfoodcamefromthesameroot	351	5.9744	1.25899
Lmalayeatwithrice	351	6.1909	1.12404
Lchinesesharemealtobonding	351	5.9088	1.22484
Valid N (listwise)	351		

Based on the results shown in Table 4, it shows a descriptive analysis of the expected performance of the users' continued use intention of the food delivery application. The analysis revealed that the statement related to "Local food plays a major role in maintaining the elements of Malaysian Heritage Food" got the highest mean score which is 6.4587 (SD=0.80561). Meanwhile, "Almost all Malaysian main dishes are eaten with rice, which is also a common food in many other Asian countries" which got a mean score of 6.1909 (SD= 1.12404). While the total mean for "Malay cuisine especially in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei is similar because it comes from the same root" is 5.9744 (SD=1.25899) and finally "In Chinese culture, it is common to share meals with others to meet new people and deepen existing friendships." with a mean of 5.9088 (SD=1.22484).

Table 5: Knowledge of Malay Heritage Food towards the people that are traveling to the Tioman and Perhentian Island

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
KnotmanyknowabouttheMHF	351	5.5584	1.56438
KnotmanyknowtocookHF	351	5.6553	1.52997
Kliketoorderonline	351	6.1225	1.29806
KHFhardtolearn	351	5.8632	1.31956
Valid N (listwise)	351		

Based on the table above, the analysis related to knowledge shows Many young generations prefer to order it online instead learn how to make it" with a total mean of 6.12259(SD=1.29806). Then the total mean was 5.8632(SD=1.31956) for "Many young generations think Heritage food is hard to learn". After that, "Not many Malaysians know the traditional equipment to cook Malaysian

Heritage Food " with a mean of 5.6553 (SD=1.52977). Lastly for "Not so many young generations know about the Food Heritage " got a mean score of 5.5584 (SD=1.56438).

4.3 Reliability test

To check the quality of the research instrument that was used in this study, the reliability of the measurement was tested. The analyses of the Cronbach's alpha-coefficient were performed to assess the reliability of the measurement. According to George & Mallery (2018), Of the thousands of measurement scales that have been constructed, two critical questions are asked of each: "Is it reliable? "and "Is it valid? "George & Maller (2018), also state that the question of reliability (the topic of this chapter) addresses the issue of whether this instrument will produce the same results each time it is administered to the same person in the same setting. Instruments used in the sciences are generally considered reliable if they produce similar results regardless of who administers them and regardless of which forms are used. Table below showed the result of the reliability analyses of the measurement study. The result also shows the result of the measurement model for the purpose of testing the reliability analysis.

Table 6: The result of the reliability of the entire measurement

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Number of Item	No. of the Item Deleted
Food Culture	0.866	4	-
Lifestyle	0.788	4	-
Knowledge	0.881	4	-

Table 6 shows the value of the Alpha is more than the 0.9 which shows that the item of the question is accepted strongly. The questions were tested and analysed for the reliability test and the result of 'Cronbach's alpha if item is deleted' were more than 0.9 which show that it was highest and good as a result, and we can accept the hypothesis that we do

4.4 Hypothesis testing

Correlation refers to synonyms for association or the relationship between variables. It measures the degree to which two sets of data are related. Higher correlation value indicates stronger relationship between both sets of data. When the correlation is 1 or -1, it shows a perfect linear positive or negative relationship exists. However, when the correlation is 0, it means there is no relationship between two sets of data.

Table 7: Correlation for Measure Constructs

		MHF	Food Culture	Lifestyle	Knowledge
MHF	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	351			
Food Culture	Pearson Correlation	.049	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.363			
	N	351	351		
Lifestyle	Pearson Correlation	.040	.587	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	351	351	351	
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.079	.376	.608	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	.351	351	351	351

Notes: * $p < 0.01$, $n = 351$

Pearson correlations were implemented to interpret the data as it is assumed there is a linear relationship between two variables. Thus, this interpret a strong, meaningful correlation and often relies on assumptions such as the variables being bivariate normally distributed and the existence of a linear relationship. (xxxx,xxx). According to the Table 7, the Pearson Correlation results determined the relationship between the Malaysia Heritage Food and food culture on tourist preference in Malaysian islands. Pearson's service quality correlation is $r = 0.49$, $N = 351$; however, the relationship was not significant ($p = 0.363$). There is a weak positive linear relationship between the Malaysia Heritage Food and food culture on tourist perception in Tioman and Perhentian islands. Thus, H1 is not supported. As for the relationship between the MHF and Lifestyle is $r = 0.040$, $N = 351$; however, the significance ($p = 0.000$). There is a strong positive linear relationship between the Malaysia Heritage Food and lifestyle on tourist preference in Malaysian islands. This supports H2, indicating that tourists' lifestyles strongly shape their perceptions of heritage food. Next is the relationship between the MHF and knowledge. Based on the Pearson Correlation result, it showed that the $r = 0.79$, $N = 351$, and significant is 0.000. So, there is a strong positive linear relationship between the Malaysia Heritage Food and knowledge on tourist preference in Malaysian islands. This supports H3, confirming that awareness and understanding enhance tourists' appreciation of heritage food. These results show that tourists' knowledge and lifestyle significantly influence their perception of MHF, consistent with prior studies on heritage tourism and culinary identity (Omar & Omar, 2018; Raji et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the weak correlation with food culture may reflect the need for deeper experiential engagement (Ng & Karim, 2016).

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships between food culture, lifestyle, knowledge, and tourists' perceptions of Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF) in Tioman and Perhentian Islands. The findings provide mixed evidence regarding the influence of these variables.

5.1 Food culture and perceptions of MHF (H1)

The analysis revealed a weak and non-significant relationship between food culture and tourists' perceptions of MHF. This result suggests that while food culture forms the backdrop of Malaysia's culinary identity, it does not directly influence how tourists perceive heritage food. Similar observations were made by Omar and Omar (2018), who argued that globalization and culinary similarities with neighbouring countries often blur the distinctiveness of Malaysian food. Tourists may enjoy the diversity of Malaysian cuisine but may not necessarily associate it with cultural authenticity unless there is deeper engagement, such as cooking demonstrations or storytelling (Ng & Karim, 2016). This finding highlights the need for more interactive strategies to showcase the cultural value of MHF beyond surface-level consumption.

5.2 Lifestyle and perceptions of MHF (H2)

The study found a significant positive relationship between lifestyle and tourists' perceptions of MHF, supporting H2. Lifestyle practices, such as communal eating, halal food preparation, and rice-centered diets, are embedded in Malaysian daily life and are often visible to tourists during their visits. Previous research has shown that lifestyle influences not only food choices but also perceptions of authenticity and cultural value (Raji et al., 2017). For instance, the Malay practice of eating with hands or sharing meals resonates with tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. These findings imply that promoting lifestyle-based practices can enhance the appeal of MHF in culinary tourism.

5.3 Knowledge and perceptions of MHF (H3)

Knowledge showed a strong and significant positive correlation with tourists' perceptions, confirming H3. This aligns with Sharif et al. (2016), who emphasized the importance of knowledge transmission for preserving traditional food practices. Tourists who are aware of the cultural and historical significance of dishes are more likely to appreciate and value them. Conversely, the younger generation's preference for convenience and online food delivery (Adilah Md Ramli, 2017) may reduce the depth of cultural knowledge available to tourists. Therefore, educational initiatives such as heritage food festivals, cooking workshops, and digital storytelling could play a vital role in sustaining and promoting MHF.

5.4 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was confined to two island destinations, Tioman and Perhentian, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Malaysia, especially urban or highly commercialized food tourism destinations. Second, the study focused only on three independent variables food culture, lifestyle, and knowledge while other influential factors such as pricing, food quality, social media influence, or environmental sustainability were not examined. Third, the use of a cross-sectional design captures tourist perceptions at one point in time but does not account for changes over time. Future research could address these limitations in several ways. Comparative studies between rural and urban destinations, or between islands and mainland regions, could provide a deeper understanding of how context shapes perceptions of MHF. Expanding the scope of variables to include economic, environmental, and technological factors may yield richer insights into the dynamics of heritage food

tourism. Longitudinal studies would help capture changes in perceptions across different generations of tourists. Finally, a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys with interviews or ethnographic observation could provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of tourists' engagement with MHF.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Malaysia is currently having significant problems maintaining its authentic cultural values. The hybridization of Malaysian cuisine causes MHF to lose its unique cultural, racial, and aesthetic aspects. This issue requires considerable attention, especially if the authenticity and originality of MHF are to be preserved. When it comes to basic materials, tastes and flavours, cooking methods, and preparation methods, Malaysian cuisine is quite like that of its bordering nations, like Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, and Indonesia. This is a prime example of how the acculturation of cultures can lead to incorrect assumptions and perceptions of Malaysian cuisine. Malaysian Heritage Food plays a vital role in national identity and tourism. This study found that knowledge and lifestyle significantly influence tourists' perceptions, while food culture alone was not a determining factor. These results echo previous conclusions that cultural sustainability requires a combination of education, lifestyle compatibility, and tourism integration (Lenzerini, 2011; Bessière, 2002). Preservation and promotion of MHF must be strategically aligned with educational, cultural, and tourism policies. Efforts should be intensified to ensure MHF remains authentic and relevant for future generations (Scovazzi, 2017; Ishak et al., 2021).

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