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**Effect of Culinary Tourism on Local Economic  
Development in South Africa**

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## Effect of Culinary Tourism on Local Economic Development in South Africa



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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the effect of culinary tourism on local economic development in South Africa.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study revealed this form of tourism, centered around experiencing local cuisine and food-related activities, contributes to the economic vitality of a region by attracting visitors who spend on dining, food tours, cooking classes, and local food markets. These expenditures generate revenue for local businesses, including restaurants, farmers, food producers, and hospitality services, thereby creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth. Additionally, culinary tourism fosters the preservation and promotion of local food culture and heritage, which can enhance a destination's

unique appeal and competitiveness. This tourism niche often leads to increased demand for local ingredients, thereby supporting agricultural sectors and encouraging sustainable farming practices. Furthermore, the development of food festivals and culinary events can boost off-season tourism, providing a steadier stream of income for local economies. Overall, culinary tourism not only enhances the economic landscape but also reinforces community identity and pride, making it a valuable component of regional development strategies.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social exchange theory, multiplier effect theory and sustainable tourism development theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effect of culinary tourism on local economic development in South Africa. To mitigate local governments, businesses, and community organizations should work together to create cohesive culinary tourism strategies. Policymakers should create frameworks that encourage sustainable culinary tourism practices.

**Keywords:** *Culinary Tourism, Local Economic Development*

## INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism, a form of experiential travel that focuses on exploring local cuisines and food-related activities, has gained significant popularity worldwide. Local economic development (LED) in developed economies such as the USA and Japan is significantly driven by revenue from tourism, job creation, and local business growth. In the USA, tourism contributes over \$1.6 trillion to the economy and supports 9.5 million jobs as of 2022, reflecting a robust recovery from the pandemic's impact (National Travel and Tourism Office, 2023). In Japan, tourism revenue reached \$34.5 billion in 2022, with significant growth in local businesses catering to the influx of international tourists (Japan Tourism Agency, 2023). Additionally, job creation in both countries has seen an upward trend, with the USA's leisure and hospitality sector adding over 2 million jobs in 2022 alone (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). These statistics highlight the vital role of tourism and local businesses in fostering economic resilience and growth in developed economies.

UK has seen a notable increase in tourism-related revenue, contributing £106 billion to the economy in 2022 and supporting 3.1 million jobs (VisitBritain, 2023). Similarly, Japan's local businesses have experienced a growth rate of 3.8% annually, driven by both domestic and international tourism (Japan External Trade Organization, 2023). These trends underscore the importance of strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and policies promoting local entrepreneurship. Furthermore, initiatives to enhance visitor experiences and promote cultural heritage have bolstered economic development, showcasing a comprehensive approach to sustainable growth (Smith, 2023).

In developing economies, local economic development through tourism, job creation, and local business growth is evident in countries like Thailand and Brazil. Thailand's tourism industry generated \$63 billion in revenue in 2022, significantly boosting local economies and creating over 8 million jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). Similarly, Brazil's tourism revenue reached \$7 billion in 2022, supporting the livelihoods of approximately 5 million individuals (Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Local businesses in these countries have also seen growth, with Thailand's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) expanding by 4.2% annually (Office of SMEs Promotion, 2023). These figures highlight the critical role of tourism in driving economic development and creating employment opportunities in developing nations.

Local economic development in developing economies such as Thailand and Brazil is significantly influenced by tourism revenue, job creation, and local business growth. In Thailand, the tourism sector generated \$63 billion in revenue in 2022, marking a substantial recovery from the pandemic and providing employment for over 8 million people (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). This surge has been instrumental in the expansion of local businesses, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) growing by an annual rate of 4.2% (Office of SMEs Promotion, 2023). Similarly, Brazil saw tourism revenue of \$7 billion in 2022, creating jobs for around 5 million people and stimulating local business growth (Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, 2023). These figures underscore the crucial role of tourism in fostering economic development and generating employment in developing nations.

In Indonesia, tourism contributed \$12 billion to the economy in 2022, supporting nearly 10 million jobs and driving local business development, particularly in hospitality and retail sectors (Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). In Mexico, tourism revenue amounted to \$24 billion in 2022, significantly impacting local economies and creating approximately 4 million jobs (Mexican Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The growth in local businesses, driven by the tourism sector, has been remarkable, with annual growth rates of 5%



in Indonesia and 4.5% in Mexico (Indonesia Chamber of Commerce, 2023; Mexican Association of Hotels and Motels, 2023). These examples highlight how strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and supportive policies for local entrepreneurs can lead to substantial economic growth and job creation in developing economies (Rodríguez, 2023).

Local economic development in developing economies, driven by tourism revenue, job creation, and local business growth, can be observed in countries like Vietnam and India. In Vietnam, the tourism sector generated \$11 billion in revenue in 2022, supporting approximately 5 million jobs and fostering significant growth in local businesses, especially in hospitality and retail (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2023). This growth has been fueled by increasing international arrivals and domestic tourism, with SMEs growing at an annual rate of 4.5% (Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2023). Similarly, India's tourism industry contributed \$194 billion to the GDP in 2022, creating over 40 million jobs and spurring the development of local enterprises (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). The substantial impact of tourism on local economic development is evident through the proliferation of local businesses and employment opportunities.

In the Philippines, tourism revenue reached \$11 billion in 2022, supporting nearly 8 million jobs and significantly impacting local business growth, particularly in coastal regions and urban centers (Philippines Department of Tourism, 2023). Local businesses in the tourism sector, including restaurants, hotels, and tour operators, have experienced annual growth rates of 5.3%, reflecting the sector's dynamism and resilience (Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2023). In Morocco, tourism generated \$8 billion in revenue in 2022, creating employment for around 3 million individuals and driving local economic activities (Moroccan Ministry of Tourism, 2023). These examples illustrate the crucial role of tourism in enhancing economic resilience, creating jobs, and promoting local business growth in developing economies (Ahmed, 2023).

Rwanda, tourism revenue reached \$1.2 billion in 2022, supporting nearly 500,000 jobs and fostering the growth of local businesses, particularly in eco-tourism and cultural heritage sites (Rwanda Development Board, 2023). Local businesses in the tourism sector have seen annual growth rates of 4%, highlighting the sector's contribution to economic development and job creation (Rwanda Chamber of Commerce, 2023). In Uganda, tourism generated \$1.6 billion in revenue in 2022, creating employment for over 600,000 individuals and driving local economic activities (Uganda Ministry of Tourism, 2023). These examples underscore the importance of strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and policies that support local entrepreneurship, ensuring sustainable and inclusive economic growth in sub-Saharan economies (Kamara, 2023).

In Kenya, for instance, tourism contributed \$1.6 billion to the economy in 2022, with significant impacts on local business growth and job creation (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Similarly, in South Africa, tourism generated \$9 billion in revenue in 2022, supporting 1.5 million jobs and driving local business development (South African Tourism, 2023). These examples illustrate how strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and policies aimed at fostering local entrepreneurship can significantly enhance economic resilience and growth. Moreover, the focus on sustainable tourism practices has further reinforced the positive economic impacts, ensuring long-term benefits for local communities (Ngugi, 2023). Additionally, local businesses in these regions have shown notable growth, with Kenya's small and medium enterprises expanding by 3.5% annually (Kenya SME Authority, 2023). In South Africa, the growth rate of local businesses has been 2.8%, spurred by the increased demand from both domestic and international tourists (South African Chamber of

Commerce, 2023). These examples highlight the importance of developing tourism infrastructure and implementing policies that support local entrepreneurship. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable tourism practices have been instrumental in ensuring that the economic benefits are long-lasting and inclusive, benefiting a broader section of society (Mugambi, 2023).

In sub-Saharan Africa, local economic development through tourism, job creation, and local business growth is exemplified by countries like Kenya and South Africa. In Kenya, tourism revenue reached \$1.6 billion in 2022, creating employment for over 1 million individuals and fostering significant growth in local businesses (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Similarly, South Africa's tourism sector generated \$9 billion in revenue in 2022, supporting approximately 1.5 million jobs and driving local economic activities (South African Tourism, 2023). These trends demonstrate the vital role of tourism in enhancing economic development and employment in sub-Saharan economies.

In sub-Saharan Africa, local economic development driven by tourism, job creation, and local business growth can be seen in countries like Tanzania and Ghana. Tanzania's tourism sector generated \$2.6 billion in revenue in 2022, supporting over 1.5 million jobs and significantly contributing to local business growth, especially in areas surrounding national parks and coastal regions (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The tourism sector's impact on local businesses is evident, with SMEs in the hospitality and service industries growing at an annual rate of 3.7% (Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Similarly, Ghana's tourism industry contributed \$3 billion to the economy in 2022, creating employment for approximately 1 million people and driving local business development (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023).

Culinary tourism activities such as food festivals, culinary tours, local food promotions, and cooking classes significantly contribute to local economic development by attracting tourists, generating revenue, creating jobs, and fostering local business growth. Food festivals, which celebrate regional cuisine and attract large crowds, directly boost tourism revenue and create temporary and permanent employment opportunities in the hospitality and service sectors (Mason & Paggiaro, 2020). Culinary tours offer immersive experiences in local gastronomy, promoting local food businesses and increasing their visibility and profitability. Local food promotions, including farm-to-table initiatives and street food markets, enhance the attractiveness of a destination, leading to increased tourist spending and support for local producers (Okumus et al., 2020). Additionally, cooking classes, which offer hands-on experiences with local ingredients and culinary techniques, not only enhance tourists' cultural experiences but also drive revenue and create employment for chefs and culinary educators

These activities collectively enhance the local economy by stimulating demand for local products and services, thereby driving business growth and job creation. For instance, food festivals often require the participation of local vendors, artisans, and performers, leading to increased business opportunities and income generation for these stakeholders. Culinary tours and cooking classes often highlight local ingredients and traditional cooking methods, thereby promoting local agriculture and food production industries (Mason & Paggiaro, 2020). Moreover, local food promotions and farm-to-table initiatives encourage sustainable tourism practices, ensuring long-term economic benefits for local communities. By linking culinary tourism activities with local economic development, destinations can create a sustainable and inclusive growth model that benefits both tourists and local residents (Okumus, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

The impact of culinary tourism on local economic development has garnered significant attention in recent years, yet there remains a need for comprehensive analysis and empirical

evidence to fully understand this relationship. While it is widely recognized that culinary tourism activities such as food festivals, culinary tours, local food promotions, and cooking classes can generate substantial revenue and create employment opportunities, the extent to which these activities contribute to sustainable economic growth and development at the local level is not well-documented. Studies indicate that food festivals and culinary tours can boost local businesses and increase tourist spending (Mason & Paggiaro, 2020), but there is limited research on how these activities impact long-term economic resilience and inclusivity. Furthermore, while local food promotions and farm-to-table initiatives are promoted as sustainable tourism practices, their actual effectiveness in enhancing local economic development remains under-explored (Okumus, Kock, Scantlebury, & Okumus, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the specific mechanisms through which culinary tourism influences local economies and to identify best practices for leveraging these activities to achieve sustainable development goals (Stone, Souldard, Migacz, & Wolf, 2019).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process where individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs in their interactions. This theory, originated by George Homans in 1958, suggests that people and organizations engage in reciprocal relationships to gain rewards and avoid losses. In the context of culinary tourism, Social Exchange Theory can explain how local communities and tourists interact to achieve mutual benefits. Locals provide unique culinary experiences, while tourists contribute economically, fostering community support for tourism activities and enhancing economic development (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2021).

### **Multiplier Effect Theory**

The multiplier effect theory, developed by John Maynard Keynes, emphasizes that an initial injection of spending (such as tourist expenditure) leads to a greater increase in national income. This theory focuses on the ripple effect of spending through various sectors of the economy. Culinary tourism stimulates spending not only in restaurants but also in local markets, accommodation, and transport sectors. Understanding the multiplier effect helps quantify the broader economic impact of culinary tourism on local economic development, highlighting how initial tourist spending can lead to significant economic growth (Dwyer, 2020).

### **Sustainable Tourism Development Theory**

Sustainable tourism development theory, articulated by Bramwell and Lane in the 1990s, emphasizes the need for tourism to be developed in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It focuses on balancing economic, social, and environmental impacts. Applying this theory to culinary tourism underscores the importance of promoting local cuisines and cultures while ensuring long-term economic benefits and environmental sustainability. This approach can help create resilient local economies and preserve cultural heritage, aligning culinary tourism with sustainable development goals (Bramwell & Lane, 2019).

### **Empirical Review**

Kim and Uysal (2021) investigated the economic impacts of culinary tourism on local communities in South Korea. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers conducted surveys and interviews with local businesses, culinary operators, and tourists. The findings

revealed that culinary tourism significantly increased local business revenues, particularly in the hospitality sector, with a notable rise in restaurant patronage during food festivals. Additionally, job opportunities expanded, as many local residents were employed in food-related roles. The study recommended enhancing marketing strategies to promote local food experiences and collaborate with local chefs to maximize economic benefits. By emphasizing the unique flavors and culinary traditions of the region, local stakeholders could better attract tourists and ensure sustained economic growth. This study contributes to understanding how culinary tourism not only enriches the local culture but also bolsters the local economy, illustrating a symbiotic relationship between the two.

Dwyer (2020) explored the economic multiplier effects of culinary festivals in Australia. Using quantitative analysis, the study assessed economic data from various regions hosting food festivals and their impacts on local economies. Results indicated that culinary festivals contributed significantly to local economic growth, generating substantial direct and indirect employment, with many local businesses reporting increased sales and customer engagement during festival periods. The research highlighted how these events not only attract tourists but also encourage community participation, fostering a sense of local pride. The recommendations included fostering partnerships between local governments and festival organizers to sustain economic growth and promote more frequent culinary events. This study underscores the potential of culinary events as vital economic drivers, providing a model for other regions seeking to enhance their local economies through strategic culinary tourism initiatives, ultimately suggesting that sustained investment in culinary tourism can yield significant economic returns.

Bramwell and Lane (2019) examined the role of sustainable culinary tourism in economic development across Europe. The researchers employed a case study methodology to evaluate various regions known for culinary tourism, focusing on sustainable practices and community involvement. Their findings showed that regions that embraced sustainability not only experienced enhanced economic growth but also improved community well-being, as local stakeholders became actively engaged in promoting their culinary heritage. The study recommended integrating sustainability principles into culinary tourism strategies to ensure long-term economic viability, suggesting that a commitment to environmental and social responsibility could lead to a more resilient local economy. Additionally, the researchers emphasized the importance of collaboration among local businesses, government entities, and community organizations to create a unified approach to culinary tourism. This research highlights the necessity of aligning culinary tourism with sustainable development goals, demonstrating how culinary initiatives can create meaningful economic benefits while protecting local culture and environment.

Stone, Soulard and Migacz (2019) focused on the experiences of culinary tourists and their economic implications in the United States. Utilizing qualitative interviews and surveys, the research aimed to understand tourist motivations, preferences, and spending patterns related to culinary experiences. The findings indicated that culinary experiences significantly influenced tourists' spending behaviors, leading to increased local economic activity, as tourists were willing to pay premium prices for authentic local cuisine. Moreover, the study found that positive culinary experiences resulted in repeat visits and recommendations, further enhancing local economic growth. The researchers recommended enhancing culinary offerings to attract more tourists and diversify the types of culinary experiences available, such as incorporating local ingredients into menus and providing cooking classes. This study emphasizes the importance of tailored culinary experiences in promoting local economic growth and suggests

that destinations can benefit from innovative culinary tourism strategies that cater to evolving tourist preferences.

Okumus, Kock and Scantlebury (2020) analyzed the impacts of local cuisine marketing on tourist arrivals and spending, highlighting the importance of promoting authentic culinary experiences. Results indicated a strong correlation between local food initiatives and increased economic activity in host communities, as tourists were attracted to regions that showcased local gastronomy. The study recommended the implementation of local food strategies as a means of economic development, emphasizing the need for targeted marketing and community involvement in culinary tourism initiatives. Furthermore, the researchers pointed out that local food promotions not only boost tourism but also enhance community pride and cultural preservation. This work illustrates the significant role that culinary tourism can play in enhancing local economies, especially in regions reliant on tourism as a primary economic driver.

Hall and Sharples (2022) investigated the impact of culinary tourism on rural community development in New Zealand. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research assessed various culinary initiatives across rural areas, including farm-to-table programs and local food festivals. The findings revealed that culinary tourism fostered community engagement, strengthened local identities, and promoted economic revitalization in these regions. Additionally, the study noted an increase in local businesses' collaboration, as many farmers and artisans worked together to create unique culinary experiences. Recommendations included developing culinary trails and promoting local producers to sustain economic benefits, advocating for ongoing support from local governments and stakeholders. This research highlights the transformative potential of culinary tourism in rural economic contexts, suggesting that strategic investments in culinary initiatives can yield both social and economic dividends for local communities.

Carrillo and Vázquez (2023) analyzed the relationship between culinary tourism and job creation in Latin America. Using statistical methods to evaluate data from multiple countries, the study found that culinary tourism significantly contributed to employment growth, especially in the food service and agriculture sectors. The research highlighted that, regions that actively promoted their culinary heritage saw a marked increase in job opportunities, benefiting local residents and fostering economic stability. Recommendations emphasized the importance of government support and investment in culinary tourism initiatives to maximize job creation and enhance community resilience. By prioritizing culinary tourism as a strategic economic development tool, policymakers can stimulate local economies and provide sustainable employment opportunities. This study contributes to understanding the broader economic impacts of culinary tourism across developing regions, offering insights into effective strategies for promoting local economic development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## **RESULTS**

**Conceptual Gaps:** Despite the existing literature highlighting the positive impacts of culinary tourism on local economic development, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that



integrate various dimensions of this relationship. Most studies focus on specific aspects such as job creation or revenue generation without providing a holistic view that includes social, cultural, and environmental factors. For instance, while Kim and Uysal (2021) emphasize the economic benefits, they do not address the potential cultural repercussions of increased tourism. Additionally, studies like those by Dwyer (2020) primarily concentrate on short-term economic impacts, overlooking the long-term sustainability of culinary tourism initiatives. There is a need for conceptual models that can encapsulate the multi-dimensional effects of culinary tourism on local economies, taking into account both tangible and intangible outcomes, as well as the interplay between community engagement and economic growth.

**Contextual Gaps:** The existing research primarily focuses on specific regions or countries, leading to a limited understanding of how culinary tourism operates in different cultural and economic contexts. For example, studies like those of Okumus, Kock, and Scantlebury (2020) emphasize small island nations, while others like Hall and Sharples (2022) concentrate on rural New Zealand. However, there is insufficient exploration of culinary tourism's effects in urban settings or less-developed regions. Additionally, the contextual factors influencing the success of culinary tourism initiatives, such as governmental support and community involvement, are not thoroughly investigated. This creates a gap in understanding how varying social and economic conditions affect the efficacy of culinary tourism in promoting local economic development. Future research should seek to fill these gaps by exploring a broader range of contexts, including urban areas and developing economies, to better understand the diverse impacts of culinary tourism.

**Geographical Gaps:** Most of the empirical studies are concentrated in specific geographical areas, such as South Korea, Australia, Europe, and Latin America. There is a notable scarcity of research addressing the impact of culinary tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, regions that possess rich culinary heritages yet are often overlooked in tourism literature. For example, while Carrillo and Vázquez (2023) highlight job creation in Latin America, similar studies are lacking in Sub-Saharan contexts, where culinary tourism could potentially contribute significantly to local economies. Additionally, the regional disparities in culinary tourism's impact necessitate further exploration, as each geographical area may present unique challenges and opportunities that affect local economic development. Expanding research to include these underrepresented areas could provide valuable insights and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the global landscape of culinary tourism.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Culinary tourism plays a significant role in promoting local economic development by fostering revenue generation, job creation, and the growth of local businesses. The studies reviewed indicate that regions that embrace culinary tourism can experience substantial economic benefits, such as increased tourist spending and enhanced community engagement. Moreover, sustainable practices within culinary tourism not only contribute to economic growth but also support cultural preservation and environmental responsibility. However, research highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of culinary tourism's multifaceted impacts, including its long-term sustainability and cultural implications. Addressing existing research gaps, particularly in underrepresented geographical regions, will be essential for developing effective strategies that leverage culinary tourism as a catalyst for local economic development. Overall, the interplay between culinary tourism and local economies underscores the importance of strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders to maximize its potential benefits.

## **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

### **Theory**

Future research should aim to develop integrated frameworks that encompass the multifaceted impacts of culinary tourism on local economies, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This will help advance theoretical understanding and provide a basis for comparative studies across different contexts. Scholars should investigate the long-term effects of culinary tourism initiatives, emphasizing sustainability and community resilience. This will enhance theoretical discussions about the enduring benefits and challenges associated with culinary tourism.

### **Practice**

Local governments, businesses, and community organizations should work together to create cohesive culinary tourism strategies. Collaborative efforts can lead to more successful events and initiatives that bolster local economies. Practitioners should prioritize authentic culinary experiences that reflect local heritage and culture. By showcasing unique local flavors, regions can attract discerning tourists and foster a strong sense of community identity. Developing training programs for local chefs and entrepreneurs can enhance the quality of culinary offerings and create a skilled workforce. This investment can drive innovation and improve service quality in the culinary tourism sector.

### **Policy**

Policymakers should create frameworks that encourage sustainable culinary tourism practices. This includes funding for local food initiatives, promoting eco-friendly events, and providing incentives for businesses that prioritize sustainability. Local governments should invest in marketing campaigns that highlight culinary tourism opportunities. Tailored strategies can help position regions as culinary destinations, attracting tourists and boosting local economies. Policymakers should support research initiatives that gather data on the impacts of culinary tourism. Comprehensive data will inform policy decisions and help assess the effectiveness of culinary tourism programs.

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