



Development Strategies of Traditional Food as a Culinary Tourism Attraction in Pekalongan City: A SWOT-Based Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This research aims to identify the potential of traditional foods as a key element in the development of culinary tourism in the city of Pekalongan. The study was conducted in two districts, East Pekalongan and West Pekalongan, which are known to have significant culinary tourism potential.

Design/methodology: This research employs a qualitative approach with data collection techniques including documentation studies, observation, and semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders, including local government officials, food vendors, and tourists. The SWOT analysis conducted reveals several strengths, such as the rich variety of unique and authentic traditional cuisines and strong cultural support. Weaknesses include ineffective promotion and limited supporting infrastructure for tourism. Opportunities are identified in the growing interest of tourists in culinary tourism and potential collaborations with the private sector. Threats include competition with other culinary tourism destinations and changing tourist preferences.

Findings: The results show that traditional foods in Pekalongan play a significant role in attracting tourists and have a positive impact on the local economy. The main challenges in developing and marketing traditional foods as a culinary tourism attraction include insufficient promotion, limited infrastructure, and low community participation. The level of involvement and support from the local government and the community needs to be increased to optimize the potential of culinary tourism based on traditional foods.

Research limitations/Implications: Based on these findings, appropriate strategies for culinary tourism development include enhancing promotion, strengthening infrastructure, and increasing community involvement.

Novelty/Originality of the study: This study is novel in its focused examination of traditional foods in Pekalongan as a strategic, place-based asset for culinary tourism development in East and West Pekalongan, integrating stakeholder perspectives and SWOT analysis to reveal the gap between rich culinary heritage and its currently limited tourism optimization.

INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism is increasingly recognized as an important driver of regional economic development, as it utilizes local food and beverages as key attractions that enhance tourist satisfaction and destination appeal (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Widyatwati, 2023). According to Horng and Tsai, (2012) culinary tourism involves tourists seeking unique and memorable food experiences that go beyond taste and incorporate cultural meaning and local wisdom. In this context, traditional food plays a strategic role in shaping tourists' perceptions, motivations, and overall travel experiences (Baiquni et al., 2018; Harsana & Triwidayati, 2020; Zulkefli et al., 2024).

Traditional culinary potential is supported by the presence of various local food businesses, ranging from street vendors to restaurants, which are widely distributed throughout the city (Gana & Hussain, 2024). This accessibility enables tourists to experience authentic local cuisine at affordable prices, making culinary tourism inclusive and attractive (Pugra et al., 2025). Traditional food is not merely a consumption product but a form of cultural heritage passed down through generations, reflecting social values, creativity, and local identity (Nurwitasari et al., 2024; Nadra et al., 2025).

The city of Pekalongan is rich in cultural and culinary heritage, particularly its traditional cuisine. The diversity of flavors, the use of locally sourced ingredients, and distinctive cooking techniques make traditional Pekalongan food a strong potential attraction for culinary tourism. Traditional dishes not only represent local identity but also offer authentic experiences sought by tourists interested in culture-based tourism (Wijaya, 2019). However,

despite this potential, traditional food development in Pekalongan faces several challenges, including limited documentation, lack of innovation, insufficient promotion, and weak integration with formal tourism development programs. Without appropriate development strategies, traditional culinary heritage risks losing competitiveness compared to modern culinary offerings. Therefore, developing traditional food as a culinary tourism attraction is a strategic effort to strengthen Pekalongan's tourism sector and enhance its destination competitiveness. Rocillo-Aquino et al., (2021) classifies traditional food based on its level of existence, ranging from nearly extinct to widely popular. This classification is relevant for understanding the current condition of traditional food in Pekalongan and for formulating appropriate development strategies. Strengthening traditional food as a culinary tourism attraction can contribute to cultural preservation, community empowerment, and local economic development (Pugra et al., 2025).

Based on this background, this study focuses on Development Strategies of Traditional Food as a Culinary Tourism Attraction in Pekalongan City: A SWOT-Based Qualitative Study. The research aims to identify the role of traditional food in supporting culinary tourism, analyze its impact on the local economy, assess the involvement of government and local communities, and formulate strategic recommendations to support sustainable culinary tourism development in Pekalongan.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to identify development strategies for sustainable culinary tourism in Pekalongan City. Qualitative data analysis followed an interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The research was conducted from February to May 2024 in Pekalongan Timur and Pekalongan Barat Districts, which selected purposively due to their strong culinary tourism potential. Informants were chosen using purposive sampling and consisted of 15 participants, including local government officials, traditional food vendors, and tourists. Data were collected through document analysis, field observations, and semi-structured interviews to capture cultural, economic, and tourism-related aspects of traditional food. Data validation was carried out using source and method triangulation (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). Internal and external factors identified from the analysis were weighted and rated to construct the IFAS and EFAS matrices, which were then integrated into a SWOT matrix (Wijaya et al., 2023), to formulate strategic recommendations for sustainable culinary tourism development in Pekalongan City.

FINDINGS

Pekalongan City is strategically located on the northern coast of Java and functions as a Regional Activity Center (PKW), supporting economic and tourism development in surrounding areas. Its strategic position along national transportation routes facilitate visitor mobility and access to tourism attractions. In addition to its strong identity as Indonesia's batik center, Pekalongan has growing tourism-supporting infrastructure, including accommodation facilities, restaurants, and cultural attractions. Figure 3 illustrates the spatial orientation of Pekalongan City, highlighting its accessibility and administrative structure, which support the distribution of culinary and cultural tourism activities across districts.



Figure 1: Orientation Map of Pekalongan City
Source: Diskominfo Kota Pekalongan, (2020)

The city of Pekalongan, as seen in Figure 1, has a maximum distance of approximately 9 km from north to south and 7 km from west to east. It consists of four districts and initially had 47 sub-districts, which were later reduced to 27 under the Local Regulation No. 8 of 2013. This administrative restructuring, effective from January 1, 2015, aimed to improve public services and optimize governance. The city's development is centered along key main roads, especially national highways leading west, east, and south. According to the Revision of Pekalongan City's Spatial Planning (RTRW) 2009-2029, the city is divided into four districts with varying sizes: Pekalongan Barat (10 km² or 22%), Pekalongan Timur (9.63 km² or 21%), Pekalongan Selatan (11.47 km² or 25%), and Pekalongan Utara (15.32 km² or 33%). The city's population in 2020 was 307,150, with a near-equal gender ratio, as shown in the population data from 2016 to 2020. Pekalongan's population density has steadily increased, reaching 6,787.85 people per km² in 2020, indicating growing pressure on the city's infrastructure and services. Furthermore, the city's workforce is becoming more educated, with a decline in the proportion of workers with only elementary education and an increase in those with higher secondary education. The majority of the population falls within the productive age group of 25-34 years, while there is also a notable number of elderly residents above 60 years, highlighting the need for inclusive development planning to address the needs of various age groups.

Figure 2 illustrates the broader culinary diversity of Java, highlighting the distribution of regional food traditions shaped by local resources, cultural practices, and historical interactions. This figure provides a contextual framework for understanding Pekalongan's traditional cuisine within the island's broader gastronomic landscape, positioning Pekalongan as part of Java's rich and diverse culinary heritage.



Figure 2: Culinary Map of Java Island
 Source: Nugraha, (2023)

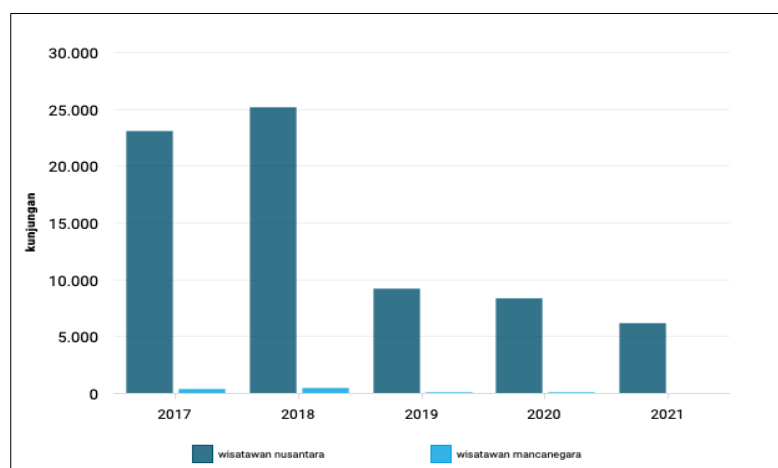


Figure 3: International and Domestic Tourist Arrivals to Pekalongan City
 Source: Diskominfo Kota Pekalongan, (2020)

The tourism sector in Pekalongan, similar to many other destinations, was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Yan et al., 2021; Sari & Hastiningsih, 2022). Figure 3 presents the trend of international and domestic tourist arrivals in Pekalongan City, showing a sharp decline during the 2020–2021 period. This condition underscores the urgency of implementing effective tourism recovery strategies that rely on resilient local resources. Culinary tourism based

on traditional food offers a promising opportunity for recovery, as it emphasizes cultural authenticity and community-based economic activities

Traditional food in Pekalongan functions not only as a cultural expression but also as a strategic tourism asset that enhances destination attractiveness. Local dishes such as Sego Megono, Soto Tauto, Garang Asem, and Kue Bapel represent local identity using traditional ingredients, cooking techniques, and inherited recipes (Mentari, 2022). Findings from field observations and interviews indicate that tourists perceive these foods as authentic experiences that differentiate Pekalongan from other destinations. As shown in Figure 4, the diversity of traditional culinary offerings strengthens Pekalongan’s gastronomic image and supports experiential tourism, where visitors seek cultural meaning rather than merely consumption.



Figure 4: Traditional Culinary of Pekalongan City
Source: Mentari, (2022)

Table 1: Positive and Negative Impacts of Culinary Tourism Based on Traditional Food Contributing to the Local Economy in Pekalongan City

Positive Impacts of Traditional Culinary Tourism in Pekalongan	Negative Impacts of Traditional Culinary Tourism in Pekalongan
Promotes local culinary heritage of Pekalongan	Potential for the commodification of traditional culinary culture of Pekalongan
Increases awareness of traditional culinary wealth in Pekalongan	Potential reduction in authenticity and originality in the presentation of traditional foods in Pekalongan
Supports the preservation of cultural values and culinary traditions in Pekalongan	Increased demand for local natural resources in Pekalongan
Enhances appreciation of the diversity of traditional culinary in Pekalongan	Negative environmental impacts from the use of natural resources in Pekalongan
Encourages sustainable agricultural practices and local ingredients in Pekalongan	Increased waste and pollution from culinary tourism activities in Pekalongan
Provides economic opportunities for local culinary entrepreneurs in Pekalongan	Risk to the local ecosystem balance in Pekalongan
Increases income and well-being of the local community in Pekalongan	Potential conflicts between commercial interests and the sustainability of traditional culinary in Pekalongan

Source: Researcher's Processed Results, (2024)

The positive and negative impacts of traditional food-based culinary tourism on Pekalongan's local economy are outlined in Table 1 illustrating both its potential to foster economic growth and its environmental and cultural challenges. By promoting local culinary heritage and creating economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs, culinary tourism can serve as a powerful tool for preserving culture and driving sustainable growth, provided it is managed with care (Larasati & Rahmawati, 2017).

Interview results also reveal that stakeholders perceive traditional food as having significant potential to support tourism development, yet this potential remains underutilized. Local government representatives emphasized that traditional cuisine can complement batik tourism by extending visitor length of stay and spending, while culinary entrepreneurs highlighted challenges related to promotion, hygiene standards, and limited innovation. Tourists interviewed expressed strong interest in traditional dishes but noted the lack of integrated culinary information and organized culinary routes. These findings indicate a gap between culinary potential and strategic management, suggesting that traditional food has not yet been positioned as a core tourism product.

DISCUSSION

The impacts of traditional food-based culinary tourism in Pekalongan extend across economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. As summarized in Table 1, culinary tourism contributes to local economic growth by creating employment opportunities and increasing income for small-scale culinary businesses (Al-Bakry, 2024; Maosul, et al., 2025). Culturally, it supports the preservation of local identity and culinary heritage. However, interview findings also indicate risks such as over-commercialization, declining authenticity, increased waste generation, and pressure on local resources. These impacts highlight the importance of managing culinary tourism strategically to balance economic benefits with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability (Pratama et al., 2024).

Based on the qualitative findings, IFAS and EFAS matrices were constructed to identify internal and external factors influencing culinary tourism development. Strengths include the diversity of traditional food, strong cultural identity, and government support, while weaknesses involve limited digital promotion, inconsistent cleanliness standards, and varying culinary skills (Prastiyanti & Yulianto, 2019; Amelia & Prasetyo, 2022). Opportunities arise from growing interest in local and experiential tourism, whereas threats include competition from other destinations and changing tourist preferences.

Table 2: SWOT Matrix for Culinary Tourism Development in Pekalongan City

IFAS EFAS	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Strategy SO	Strategy WO
Opportunities	Pekalongan City can intensively utilize social media to promote its unique culinary offerings, organize national/international culinary events, support local communities in marketing and product development, improve tourism infrastructure, and maintain consistent culinary quality.	The steps include improving digital promotion, hygiene and sanitation standards, diversifying markets to reach new segments, enhancing public transportation accessibility, and providing intensive training to improve education and skills in the culinary industry.
Threats	Strategy ST Pekalongan City will optimize collaboration with private sectors for product innovation, develop bold destination promotions, raise public awareness about culinary heritage, adjust government policies, and manage raw material costs effectively in response to threats from competitors and market changes.	Strategy WT The steps include improving responsive promotion, adapting to changes in government policies, efficient raw material and food cost management, and focusing on operational sustainability to address challenges from competitors and market fluctuations in Pekalongan's culinary tourism industry.

Source: Researcher's Processed Results, (2024)

The SWOT matrix in Table 2 demonstrates that Pekalongan is positioned in a growth-oriented quadrant, suggesting that strategies should focus on strengthening promotion, integrating culinary and batik tourism, improving hygiene standards, and enhancing stakeholder collaboration. Figure 5 further illustrates Pekalongan's strategic position, emphasizing the need to leverage cultural strengths while addressing structural weaknesses.

The SWOT analysis presented in Table 2 indicates that Pekalongan City possesses substantial potential for culinary tourism development by leveraging its rich traditional culinary heritage, strong government support, and active community participation. These internal strengths position traditional food as a strategic asset capable of enhancing destination competitiveness, particularly when integrated with Pekalongan's established image as Indonesia's batik center. Opportunities such as the growing interest in experiential and local-based tourism, the extensive reach of social media, and the organization of national and international culinary events provide avenues to strengthen Pekalongan's culinary destination branding. However, qualitative findings from interviews and observations reveal persistent challenges, including limited digital promotion, inconsistent cleanliness and

sanitation standards, uneven culinary skills among local actors, and competition from other culinary destinations (Widjanarko et al., 2024). Addressing these weaknesses through improved digital marketing strategies, standardized hygiene practices, capacity-building programs, and market diversification is therefore critical.

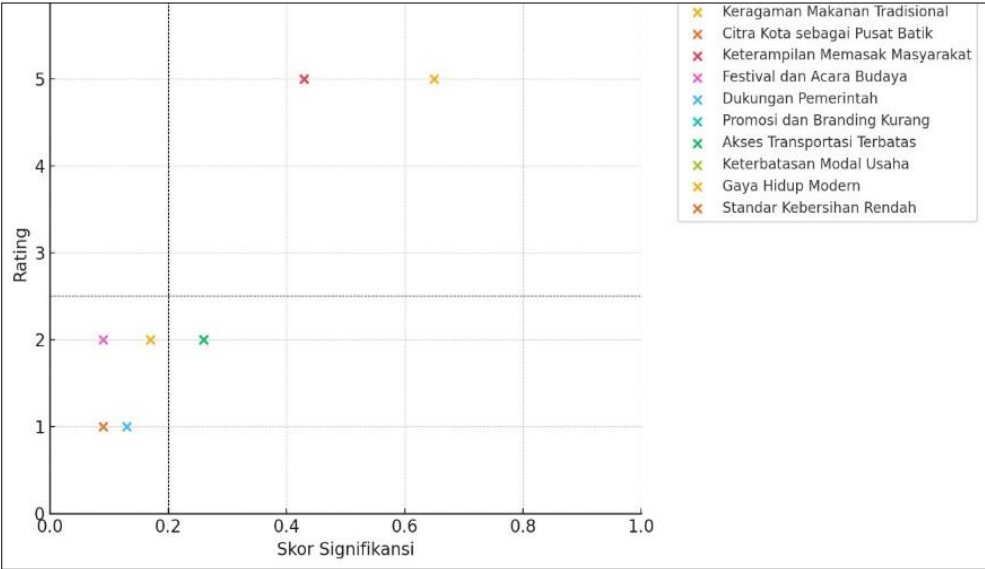


Figure 5: Cartesian Diagram of SWOT Analysis
Source: Researcher's Processing, 2024

Further strategic interpretation using the IFAS–EFAS-based Cartesian Diagram in Figure 5 shows that Pekalongan is positioned in a quadrant characterized by strong internal potential and moderate external challenges. The city's cultural identity as a batik hub (X: 0.9; Y: 5) emerges as a key strength that can be synergized with traditional culinary tourism to create integrated cultural experiences. Cultural festivals, such as the Pekalongan Batik Festival, serve as strategic platforms to introduce traditional cuisine alongside Batik heritage, thereby extending tourist length of stay and expenditure. Nevertheless, weaknesses such as the underutilization of traditional food diversity (X: 0.2; Y: 2), limited transportation accessibility, and inadequate cleanliness management constrain the optimal development of culinary tourism. External threats, including inadequate destination branding (X: 0.2; Y: 1), shifting tourist preferences toward Western cuisine, and fluctuating raw material costs, further emphasize the need for adaptive and sustainable strategies.

Previous studies have demonstrated that traditional food has significant potential to attract tourists by offering distinctive cultural experiences (Putri et al., 2023; Pugra et al., 2025). Other research emphasizes that culinary experiences can function as primary attractions rather than complementary elements within tourism destinations (Hall et al., 2004; Soeroso & Turgarini, 2020). These findings indicate that strategic development of traditional food can enhance destination appeal and tourism competitiveness.

Based on this analysis, the development strategy for culinary tourism in Pekalongan should focus on strengthening destination branding through digital platforms, influencer collaborations, and integrated batik–culinary tourism packages. Improving transportation infrastructure, enhancing culinary skills through targeted training, and enforcing hygiene and environmental standards are essential to improve tourist satisfaction and destination image. By implementing strategies across all SWOT quadrants, Pekalongan can maximize the strategic role of traditional food in tourism development, ensuring economic benefits for local communities while preserving cultural authenticity and environmental sustainability. This study complements previous research on traditional food-based culinary tourism (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2023; Nadra et al., 2025) by offering a holistic, strategy-oriented perspective that integrates cultural heritage, stakeholder involvement, and digital promotion, thereby contributing to both tourism theory and practical destination management.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that traditional food plays a strategic role in the development of culinary tourism in Pekalongan City by offering authentic cultural experiences that enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness. The availability, diversity, and consistent quality of traditional dishes contribute significantly to increasing tourist interest, supporting local economic growth, and preserving culinary heritage. The development of traditional food-based culinary tourism also demonstrates positive socio-economic impacts, particularly through job creation and the strengthening of local culinary enterprises. However, challenges remain, including

maintaining food quality standards, improving cleanliness and sanitation, ensuring sustainable resource management, and enhancing destination accessibility. The active involvement of local government and communities has proven essential in supporting infrastructure development, promotional activities, and capacity-building initiatives for culinary stakeholders.

To optimize the long-term potential of culinary tourism in Pekalongan, integrated and sustainable development strategies are required. These include strengthening digital promotion through social media and influencer collaboration, organizing national and international culinary events, diversifying target markets, and improving public transport and supporting tourism facilities. Preserving traditional recipes and culinary narratives while allowing adaptive innovation in food presentation is crucial to attract younger and international visitors without compromising authenticity. Furthermore, the adoption of environmentally friendly practices in ingredient sourcing and waste management should be prioritized to reinforce Pekalongan's image as a sustainable culinary destination. Through coordinated efforts among government, local communities, and the private sector, traditional food can be positioned not only as a cultural asset but also as a key driver of sustainable tourism development and regional economic resilience in Pekalongan City.

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