

# FOREIGN TOURIST'S FOOD PREFERENCES IN LOMBOK: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

*by* Handry Athar

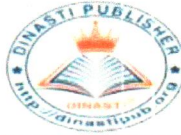
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## FOREIGN TOURIST'S FOOD PREFERENCES IN LOMBOK: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract:** Customer behavior is one of the challenging studies in marketing. Most of all, the customer's behavior towards a tourism destination's product such as food or as we often call gastronomy. This study is a qualitative research aimed to know what's behind the food preferences of foreign tourist from different countries (such as Australia, Finland, Japan, Malaysia, and the UK), what motivates them when choosing a certain food during their holiday. In-depth interview along with keen observation were held to get sufficient information and deep results on the purpose of the study. This study was held in Lombok and ten participants were being interviewed. The results indicate that there are three main aspects that affect the participants in choosing their food when in a tourism destination: a) Exposure effect; b) Intention to looking for new experiences and/or based on past experiences; and c) The food aspects. This study surely answers that providing sufficient information to the international market of our tourism industry is a big must as they surely will search for related information before deciding on what to consume in a certain destinations as well as providing them with good quality culinary and a long life experiences that they can cherish in the future.

**Keywords:** consumer behavior, culinary preferences, food tourism, gastronomy, tourists' preferences.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to The Study

One of the growing industries which allows researcher to conduct more studies as it is required to finding out the issues and the answers to industry's problem is tourism. Consumer behavior in tourism is one research's topic we can always explore. And on this particular research, we study tourist's preferences on food during their holidays in Lombok. In this

research's context, food preference is defined as the expression of tourists' choices on two or more food that are available in a tourism destination (Chang and Mak, 2010).

Food tourism is growing and according to World Tourism Organization (2012) gastronomy has become one necessary aspect in attempt to knowing the local culture and way of life of a tourism destination (Josman, 2016). This followed by incredible efforts from the tourism business sectors and the government to increase the quality and value of their local food in every destination.

Prior to this study, observation to some of local restaurants in Kuta, Lombok showed that more foreign tourists are coming and are relatively more occupied than western or foreign restaurants. Pre-study interview with some local restaurant owners also gave the understanding that foreign tourists are more interested in local food and that they mostly ask for more information about the locals, their ingredients, or any interesting cultural story behind them (Josman, 2016). It has also been said that the first timer Lombok visitor will most likely to try local food other than any other on the menu. This phenomenon strongly proves the idea that gastronomy is a very important part in human's effort to learning the local culture and that it is the expression of the tourism destination's culture (Chang and Mak, 2010).

World Tourism Organization (2012) stated that in the last few years, gastronomy has been a necessity in learning the culture and lifestyle of a certain destination. It also stated that food tourism in the world is growing rapidly and has become the most dynamic part of the industry. More competition in the food industry in a destination has risen up in order to fulfill the demand of tourists' expectation. And this competition is one of the reasons as to why this study of foreign tourist preference on food is very important together with the realization of human's differences (cultural background, favorite, reasoning, etc) will also take part in their preferences and decision.

Previous study (Josman, 2016) shows that most of the restaurants in one of the main tourism destination of Lombok that is Kuta serve foreign food twice or thrice the number of local food and prior to this study, this phenomenon is still happening. This of course increases the curiosity as to why the restaurateurs prefer to serve more foreign food than local food; or if their decision is based on tourists preferences or a poor judgment on their true potential to grow its own local food identity.

A part from that, the needs of research on this topic can be inferred from the limited number of previous research in the same field (Chang et al., 2010; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Stewart, Bramble and Ziraldo, 2008; in Mak et al, 2012, *draft version*). Hsu (2014) stated that even though research in the field of food tourism has been done many times, but research on consumer behavior which focused on tourists' preferences on food is very rare. As quoted by Shenoy (2005) is the following statement of Mitchell and Hall (2003):

*"Studies of consumer behavior in the area of food tourism are rare and, as a result, the picture we have of the food tourist, is at best sketchy, and considerable amount of research is required to understand food tourism consumer behavior more effectively. To date the material that does exist has been borrowed from more general tourism studies or has been inferred from studies not directly related to tourism."*

That statement can only mean that research on this field is still very needed thus this research is still very relevant, especially in a growing tourism destination such as Lombok Island.



### Statement of Research Problem

The followings are the research problems:

1. How are the food preferences of foreign tourists in Lombok?
2. What are the implications, potentials, and challenges facing by Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara in developing the local culinary?

### Objective of The Research

The objectives of the research are:

1. To know the food preferences of foreign tourists in Lombok.
2. To know and describe the implications, potentials, and challenges facing by Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara in developing the local culinary.

### Research Contribution

The findings of this research helps researcher and tourism industry to know the food preferences of foreign tourist which will allows them to decide on what to do next in term of developing the quality and value they offer to the tourists, thus allowing our tourism industry to grow and noticeable not only for the natural beauty, but also for the food and cultural tourism.

### Limitations

This research is a qualitative research; means that the writers don't take into count which factors affect the food's preferences of foreign tourist the most. There are still a lot of room for improvement that can be done for the future researchers.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Gastronomy

Gastronomy which defined by Oxford Dictionary (Anonim, 2015) as a practice or an art of choosing ingredients, cooking and enjoying the good food, can actually be a form of implementing the traditional values of a tourism destination which are respecting the local culture and tradition, healthy life style, sustainability, and experiences. This implies that it needs to be more than just for respecting the culture and tradition, but the activity of local food marketing has to be sustainable, and can give a valuable experience to the tourists (Josman, 2016).

**Table 2.1 Definition of Food Tourism**

<i>Author/year</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Smith and Xiao (2008, p. 289)	<i>Culinary tourism is any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, or consumes branded local culinary resources.</i>
International Culinary Tourism Association (2011)	<i>Culinary tourism is the pursuit of unique and memorable culinary experience of all kinds while in a travel context.</i>
Green and Dougherty (2008, p. 150)	<i>Culinary tourism is the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences, and provides a way of linking local food systems with the tourist experience.</i>

**Ignatov and Smith**  
(2006, p. 237)

<sup>4</sup> *Culinary tourism is tourism trips during which the purchase or consumption of regional foods (including beverages), or the observation and study of food production (from agriculture to cooking schools) represents a significant motivation or activity.*

**Ottenbacher & Harrington** (2010, p. 14)

*Gastronomy and culinary tourism can be described as tourism where an opportunity for memorable food and drink experiences contributes significantly to travel motivation and behaviour.*

<sup>3</sup> **Hall & Mitchell**  
(2006, p. 137)

*Food tourism as a visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivation for travel.*

<sup>6</sup> **Long (2004, p. 21)**

*It is an experience of food or food ways other than one's own.*

Source: Adapted from Hsu (2014)

As stated before, there has been some research in the field of gastronomy (food tourism), and some of them are shown in the following table (Hsu, 2014)

**Table 2.2 Research on Food Tourism**

<i>Author/year</i>	<i>Key concept</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Research method</i>	<i>Discussion issue</i>
Hegarty (2001)	<i>Gastronomy</i>	<i>The theory of knowledge</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Management policy</i>
Marcel and Zdenko (2003)	<i>Food, Marketing</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Marketing strategy</i>
Cohen & Avieli (2004)	<i>Culinary establishment</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Attraction and impediment</i>
Quan & Wang (2004)	<i>Tourists experience</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Experience</i>
Kivela & Crotts (2005)	<i>Marketing segment</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Quantitative Explanatory</i>	<i>Marketing segment</i>
Okumus et al (2007)	<i>Gastronomy, Destination marketing</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Marketing strategy</i>
Stewart et al. (2008)	<i>Wine and culinary tourism</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Management policy</i>
Everett & Aitchison (2008)	<i>Rural regeneration</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Regional identity</i>
Correia et al (2008)	<i>Food tourism, Gastronomy, Satisfaction</i>		<i>Quantitative Explanatory</i>	<i>Gastronomy satisfaction</i>
Gyimothy & Mykletun (2009)	<i>Adventure tourism,</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Destination marketing</i>
Smith and Costello (2009)	<i>Culinary tourism,</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Quantitative Explanatory</i>	<i>Tourists' motivation and satisfaction of</i>



Kim, Kim, and Goh(2011)	<i>Revisit intention</i>	<i>The modified theory of reasoned action (TRA)</i>	<i>Quantitative Predictive</i>	<i>culinary event Tourists behaviour</i>
Lin, Pearson, & Cai (2011)	<i>Destination identity and branding</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Content analysis, Quantitative Exploratory</i>	<i>Destination marketing</i>
Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán (2011)	<i>Culinary Tourist</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Quantitative Exploratory</i>	<i>Marketing strategy</i>
Mak, Lumbers, & Eves(2012)	<i>Tourists eating behaviour and food consumption</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Quantitative Exploratory</i>	<i>Tourists' food consumer behaviour</i>
Barre et al (2013)	<i>Food tourism, Tourists experience</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Local food product positioning</i>
Son & Xu (2013)	<i>tourist culinary experience</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Motivation and Experience</i>
Okech (2014)	<i>Culinary tourism</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Food and culture</i>
		<i>N/A</i>	<i>Qualitative descriptive</i>	<i>Food and culture</i>

Source: adapted from Hsu (2014)

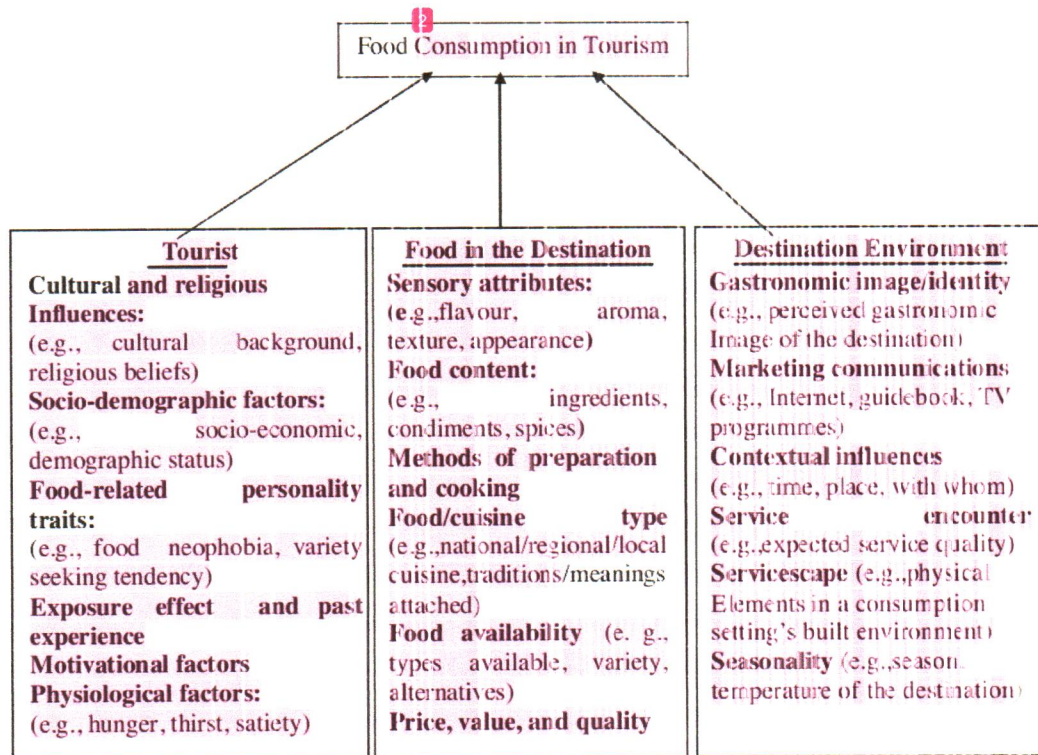
Shenoy (2005:176) stated in his research that the fundamental of food tourism or gastronomy is a tourism destination can provide a new and distinguish product to the tourists. This means that food tourism product should be new, different, and be local.

### Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is a study of how individual, group, and organization choose, buy, use, and how goods, services, ideas, or experiences are used to satisfy their wants and needs (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 166). In the context of tourism, the success of marketing relates to the knowledge of decision making process on buying and using a tourism product (Alexandra, 2013: 186).

The following as a diagram that shows factors affecting food consumption in tourism studied theoretically by Randall and Sanjur (1981) which concluded that food consumption is affected by the food itself, the tourist, and the environment of a destination.

Diagram 2.1 Factors affecting food consumption in tourism (A Theoretical Model for the Study of Food Preferences) (Randall and Sanjur, 1981 in Mak et al. 2012).



As defined by Rozin and Vollmecke (1986) in Chang and Mak (2010), food preference relates to the activity of choosing one item amongst many other available choices and in the context of this research, food preference is defined as the expression of tourists in choosing two or more foods available in a destination (Chang dan Mak, 2010). On the other hand, local food is food and drink that are made and produced locally or foods and drinks that have the traditional value of a destination (Nunmedal and Hall, 2006 in Chang dan Mak, 2010).

### RESEARCH METHODS

As this research was designed to understand deeply on what affects the food preferences of foreign tourists, qualitative approach was used. Qualitative approach is believed to be the best for this study as it allows the researcher to see thoroughly at the objects, sharply understand value and changing situations during the research (Moleong, 2011: 10).

Ten informants were randomly chosen from different countries such as Australia (2 people), Finland (2 person), Japan (2 people), Malaysia (1 person), and the UK (3 people). The participants were tourists who were visiting Lombok or had been visited Lombok in the past for at least three consecutive days and have tried at least one local food in Lombok. The number of informants were not decided before as the researchers adopted theoretical sampling which allows researchers to choose the number of participants until the information gathered are saturated (Glaser, 1978).

In-depth interview was being held with series of questions, started with the personal information of each participant (name, age, nationality, reason of visits, occupation, and



email address). Before the interview, each participant was informed that information they provided would be used and analyzed for the purpose of this study. The duration of each interview varied from fifteen minutes to an hour long. Other than verbal/direct interview, non-verbal interview such as communications through Whatsapp and email was also used for participants who were not available for a direct interview.

Each conversation was recorded and was re-written to a transcript, separated from each participant's into a specific folder, and along with that, pictures and videos were also taken for the purpose of documentation.

Observation was also a part of methodology used in this study. Observation is used to directly witness the social situation of a place (e.g restaurant or other culinary business in Kuta and Senggigi), actor (foreign tourists in Lombok), and activities (foreign tourists' behavior or specifically their food preferences while in Lombok) (Sugiyono, 2012).

All data was analyzed by adapting Miles and Huberman method which is *data reduction* (all transcripts were reduced into fractions to get useful and specific information), *data display*, (useful and informative data is displayed in the journal and *conclusion drawing/verification* (Sugiyono, 2012).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Foreign Tourists' Food Preferences

As results of getting more attention from international tourists, Lombok has a big game ahead. Both governments and business owners have homework to do which is to improve the quality and value of all of their tourism products, which in this research context, to improve their food's quality and value.

In-depth interviews with foreign tourists visiting Lombok give an interesting results and pictures of their food preferences. Further discussion on what affects their food preferences is available below.

#### a) Exposure effect

Australian informants in this research explain that Indonesian food (he didn't mention Lombok specifically) is widely available in Australia which means he is more familiar with the taste of local food (Josman, 2016).

*"Well, In Australia we have a lot of international food, so we have Indonesian food as well but it's not as good as it is here. And it's not local source, so.."*

This idea is also supported by Cohen dan Avieli (2004, in Mak et al, 2012) that an ethnic restaurant could be available in a certain country which could be the source of information for international tourists before visiting a country. Despite the differences of the quality of the taste, exposure of local food for him is believed to be one of his reasons in choosing food while visiting a destination.

#### b) Intention to looking for new experiences and/or based on past experiences

One of the reasons for tourists to visit a country is to get new experiences, a new authentic experience which brings values in their lives (Yurtstevan and Kaya, 2011). They are looking for something different, especially those who are visiting for the first time (Josman, 2016), the combination of food and drink which brings the local vibe and value (Hjalager, 2003, in Yurtstevan and Kaya, 2011).

As some of the informants said:

*"Well because when you come somewhere, you want to kind of leave an experience of a lot more of local things".*



*“Kalau di Lombok mau cari makanan yang original dari asal usul di sini. Maksudnya makanan tu tak ade di Malaysia tapi ade di sini- In Lombok, we are looking for something that is originally from here, something that we can’t find in Malaysia and is only available here in Lombok”*

These statements implied that for tourist, locality of a product is crucial. Thus, new experience can be gathered.

**c) The food aspects**

Food aspects stand for the taste, the ingredients, the hygiene, and the quality of its raw material. Previous study held by Roinien et al (2001) explained that health is as important as the taste of the food and that this is also one of the aspects considered in food preferences (Brunso et al, 2002).

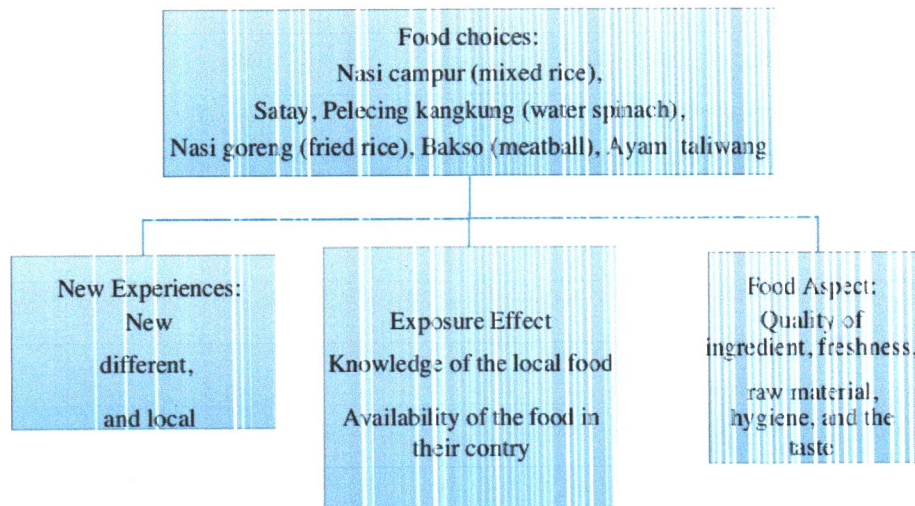
Some informants mentioned that they love Lombok local food because they are mostly spicy and tasteful and that they have several of vegetables choices. On the bad notes, more tourists from Japan said that fish served in Lombok is not very fresh.

*“I just like it because it have so much selection and different.”*

*“In Australia there is a lot of chemical. Here everything is natural and fresh. Beautiful.”*

All these statements explained that quality of the ingredients and the taste of the food are very important for tourists. Yurtstevan and Kaya (2011) explained that the quality of the taste (freshness, health, the taste of each ingredient) is one of the main aspects in food preferences.

Diagram 4.1 Foreign Tourists' Food Preferences



**Implications, Potentials, and Challenges for Lombok Local Food**

Observation and pre-interview on this research allowed researcher to witness and understand the pattern of foreign tourists’ food preference. It shows some interesting result. Foreign tourists who are in Lombok for the first time are more likely to have local food.

The followings are some statements of some different informant involved in this research:  
 "...but I prefer local food as I like to try something local while I am in different country"  
 ".....I'd rather eat local food here than western food."  
 "I think it's important, if you go to new country you should try the local food not just go with what you feel safe..."  
 "We don't like the one that only serves western food, it doesn't sound real..."

They all implied that they are excited to try something new and more local food. They prefer local food when they are visiting a tourism destination, and for them it is important to try something local other than just their own food. This surely means that Lombok has a great potential in stepping up their local food game to meet this demand.

"Cause I'd love to try more local dishes, but it might just say like ..campur" or something on it and we don't know what that is.."

This statement calls our awareness that these international tourists don't speak our local language, which means that we have to have proper international language that is English when presenting our food in the menu. They need more information before deciding what to buy, and it is the local business duty to provide them with such.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the result of this study, we can conclude the followings:

1. Foreign tourists in Lombok prefer Nasi campur (mixed rice), Satay, Pelecing kangkung (water spinach), Nasi goreng (fried rice), Bakso (meatball), and Ayam taliwang. There are three aspects that resulted in these preferences which are exposure effect, intention to look for experiences, and food aspect.
2. Lombok has a great potential to develop and introduce their local food to the tourists and have more tourists coming to try and experience the local culture of Lombok.

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