

NGUYEN HONG ANH

**CRAFTING CULINARY MEMORIES: EXPLORING THE INGREDIENTS
OF A MEMORABLE VIETNAMESE FOOD EXPERIENCE
IN ROSE KITCHEN COOKING CLASS**



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Master in Tourism
Specialty in Tourism Marketing

Work made under the supervision of:
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Work Authorship Declaration

I declare to be the author of this work, which is unique and unprecedented. Authors and works consulted are properly cited in the text and are included in the listing of references.

NGUYEN HONG ANH

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RESUMO

A gastronomia vietnamita é um traço cultural distintivo que atrai turistas e estrangeiros. Há muitos anos que a gastronomia e culinária vietnamita é muito apreciada pelos especialistas e pelos meios de comunicação internacionais. Muitos pratos estão na lista das iguarias mundiais, em 2023 o país foi nomeado como o melhor destino gastronómico do mundo e ficou em 5.º lugar na lista dos dez países com a melhor gastronomia do mundo. A estratégia de desenvolvimento do turismo no Vietname até 2030 também identifica a gastronomia como a principal tendência cultural, contribuindo para melhorar a competitividade e a marca turística nacional. De facto, muitas agências de viagens, operadores turísticos e chefes qualificados realizaram com sucesso muitas aulas de culinária interativas em todo o país, apresentando pratos que se tornaram icónicos na gastronomia vietnamita.

No contexto de turismo gastronómico, o termo *experiência turística* já não é novo para os investigadores, sendo que o foco mudou de experiência normal para experiência memorável e, ao longo dos anos, os investigadores têm vindo a realizar uma série de estudos sobre a Experiência Gastronómica Memorável (*Memorable Food Experience*). Este tipo de experiência não tem, no entanto, sido alvo de grande atenção no contexto das aulas de culinária. Tendo em conta a escassez na literatura sobre experiências relacionadas com a gastronomia, o objetivo principal deste estudo é investigar as perceções mais relevantes sobre os elementos que tornam genuinamente memoráveis as experiências de turismo gastronómico no contexto de aulas de culinária, considerando um local turístico como o Vietname. Quanto ao contexto do estudo, escolhemos Rose Kitchen Cooking Class, em Hanói, graças à sua alta reputação e à sua posição como uma das melhores aulas de culinária nessa cidade de acordo com o TripAdvisor.

Para abordar o problema, foi aplicado um método de estudo qualitativo, utilizando o Conteúdo Gerado pelo Usuário (*User-Generated Content*) como os principais dados de pesquisa. Os dados foram recolhidos a partir dos comentários dos clientes (n=754) sobre as aulas de culinária no TripAdvisor publicados nesta plataforma entre abril de 2022 e março de 2024. No estudo, aplicou-se a abordagens indutiva e dedutiva para analisar os comentários. O processo de codificação foi realizado inicialmente utilizando o NVivo – um software de análise de dados qualitativos - para explorar os dados numa perspetiva indutiva. Em seguida, outros investigadores confirmaram os resultados dedutivamente, validando-os com a literatura existente.

Oito temas ou dimensões principais surgem da análise, a partir do número de ocorrências por tema (n=2484): (1) autenticidade, (2) dimensões das comidas, (3) contribuição do guia/chefe, (4) hospitalidade, (5) dimensões do conhecimento, (6) espaço e ambientes, (7) sentido de comunidade e, por fim, (8) comportamentos futuros, como uma consequência das memórias gastronómicas inesquecíveis. Cada uma destas dimensões é descrita abaixo:

1. Autenticidade: a dimensão *autenticidade* emergiu como uma das componentes mais relevantes para a experiência gastronómica memorável. Os comentários mostram o entusiasmo dos participantes ao visitar o mercado local a fim de seleccionar ingredientes, ao utilizarem os métodos tradicionais que são usados há séculos ou ao observar os hábitos de vida dos locais; este conjunto de atividades contribui significativamente para o sentimento de autenticidade do ponto de vista dos participantes.
2. Comida ou alimentação: a dimensão *comida* ou *alimentação* refere-se à qualidade e ao sabor dos pratos preparados durante as aulas de culinária, que foram outro aspeto essencial para a criação de uma experiência memorável. Os participantes revelaram a sua admiração especialmente pelo sabor dos pratos, bem como pela frescura dos ingredientes adquiridos no mercado.
3. Hospitalidade: a dimensão *hospitalidade* oferecida pelos anfitriões das aulas foi amplamente elogiada pelos participantes, junto com a generosidade e a simpatia dos guias/chefes, que oferecem um ambiente amigável e confortável aos participantes, criando um ambiente de aprendizagem positivo.
4. Conhecimento: a dimensão *conhecimento* representa a oportunidade de aprender técnicas culinárias e também de adquirir um entendimento mais profundo sobre a cultura e as tradições do Vietname, um dos factos mais valiosos segundo os comentários. Neste sentido, os participantes podem adquirir informação sobre os ingredientes locais e, ainda, sobre a origem e a história em cada prato. Ao mesmo tempo, as dicas e os truques da culinária vietnamita que são transmitidas pelos guias/chefes também foram avaliados de forma muito positiva.
5. Contribuição do guia/chefe: das oito dimensões, a *contribuição dos guias/chefe* foi a mencionada com mais frequência nas avaliações, sublinhando o seu papel crucial na melhoria das experiências gastronómicas memoráveis dos visitantes durante as suas

aulas de culinária. Os participantes apreciaram o conhecimento da culinária e da cultura vietnamita transmitido pelos chefes, bem como o entusiasmo e a profissionalismo do guia em organizar e interagir com o resto da aula.

6. Espaço e ambiente: a dimensão *espaço e ambiente* diz respeito às aulas que decorreram num espaço autêntico e tranquilo, que foi particularmente apreciada, pelo que um espaço bem organizado e confortável pode enriquecer a experiência dos participantes.
7. Sentimento de comunidade: a dimensão *sentimento de comunidade* integra a sensação dos participantes, que são de diferentes países, de que uma aula de culinária no destino de viagem pode proporcionar sentido de pertença e de conexão. Deste modo, os participantes comunicam, aprendem entre si e tornam-se amigos após a aula.
8. Comportamentos futuros: a dimensão de *comportamentos futuros* advém da experiência memorável, pois o estudo revelou que a maioria dos participantes expressaram o desejo de recomendar as aulas a outras pessoas, bem como o desejo de replicar as receitas aprendidas em casa, de forma a divulgar a diversidade da culinária vietnamita.

Em resumo, este estudo destaca a importância das aulas culinárias, especificamente a Rose Kitchen Cooking Class, como uma forma de promover a experiência gastronómica memorável. Além disso, os resultados dão suporte à perspectiva de que a contribuição do guia/chefe desempenha um papel crucial na criação das experiências memoráveis dos turistas devido à frequência com que é referido nos comentários. Como consequência, os organizadores de aulas de culinária e os operadores turísticos poderão beneficiar ao focarem-se nestes elementos, criando experiências que atendam às expectativas dos turistas e incentivem os comportamentos futuros, nomeadamente a intenção de recriação das receitas ou a recomendação a outros viajantes.

Ao contribuir para o estudo sobre o turismo gastronómico em geral e para o turismo gastronómico vietnamita em particular, esta investigação reforça a literatura sobre as experiências gastronómicas memoráveis, especificamente no contexto das aulas de culinária, um aspeto que parece merecer mais atenção dos investigadores. Adicionalmente, esta investigação apresenta várias sugestões para a gestão de empresas e de organizações dedicadas à experiência gastronómica, garantindo, assim, o desenvolvimento da indústria do turismo gastronómico no Vietname.

Palavras-chaves: Experiência Memorável, Experiência Gastronómica Memorável, Turismo Gastronómico, Aula da culinária, Vietname

ABSTRACT

In recent years, scholars have studied Memorable Food Experiences (MFEs). However, this type of experience has not received much attention in the context of cooking class activities. Considering this gap in the literature and tackling this research problem, this study attempts to tease out and understand the main elements of the MFEs within the context of cooking classes, focusing on Vietnam as a tourism location. A qualitative method was applied to User-Generated Content (UGC) data retrieved from 754 customer reviews on TripAdvisor between April 2022 and March 2024. The data analysis process was carried out iteratively using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

The results highlight customer reviews focused on eight main themes, which were ranked according to number of occurrences per theme: (1) authenticity, (2) food dimensions, (3) guide/chef contribution, (4) hospitality, (5) knowledge dimensions, (6) space and settings, (7) sense of community and, subsequently, (8) future behavior. Out of the eight dimensions, the guides/chef's contribution was frequently mentioned in the reviews, underscoring their critical role in enhancing visitors' MFEs during cooking classes. This research also offers several managerial guidelines for businesses and organizations to conduct well-coordinated cooking classes, particularly in Vietnam.

Keywords: Memorable Experience, Memorable Food Experience, Food/Gastronomy Tourism, Cooking Class, Vietnam

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1. Introduction

Food was suspected to be one of the top attractions when tourists come to a particular destination (Long, 2004; Richard, 2015; Sormaz et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2017, Tovmasyan, 2019). Four out of five tourists (79%) who travel to a new place learn about the local cuisine in compliance with the Food Travel Monitor (2020) (Stone et al., 2020). In the context of food tourism, hosting interactive cooking classes at travel destinations offers a unique opportunity to bring local cuisine closer to international visitors, as well as to locals who are eager to explore and deepen their understanding of their cultural heritage. By learning the dish name, attendees of these culinary courses will gain additional knowledge about the ingredients, nutritional content, and recipe of each dish they prepared during the event. Additionally, as the focus has transitioned from emphasizing the product or service to highlighting the experience as a value-added component, a question arises: can we measure the visitor's sense of unforgettable food memory?

Despite the various studies about the Memorable Food Experiences (MFEs) (Sthapit et al., 2021; Shoukat et al., 2023; Kodas & Aksoy, 2023), attention has yet to be given to these experiences in the context of cooking class activity (Yigit, 2022; Qian et al., 2023; Atsiz et al., 2024). Food experiences are an area that deserves further investigation due to its value to tourists, such as discovering novel and exotic aspects of destinations (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Moreover, food experiences can be a learning tool (Yigit, 2022) that allows tourists to participate directly and actively in the co-creation experience (Agapito et al., 2023). Gastronomy tourism has become an increasingly popular niche within the broader tourism industry (Dixit & Prayag, 2022), and cooking classes offer tourists a unique opportunity to engage with local culture and cuisine on a deeper level (Yigit, 2022). Even though cooking class activities are not a new term in the field of tourism studies, more attention need to be paid to the memorable aspects of this phenomenon (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Amaro & Duque, 2022; Yigit, 2022; Atsiz et al., 2024).

“There is no better place to entertain the leader of the free world, in my opinion, than one of these classic, funky, family-run noodle shops you find all over Hanoi.” (Rose, 2023). Spoken by what we can consider to be the first food vlogger of the world - Anthony Bourdain, in his famous TV food series in Vietnam, a country located in the Southeast region of Asian. Besides its broadly acknowledged cultural significance, Vietnam is also known for its rich flavours and diverse fresh ingredients in each of their dishes; from lots of leafy greens and fish, very limited amounts of animal protein and fat, to minimal cooking and moderate use of sugar (Avieli, 2011). After visiting

Vietnam, Vietnamese food usually holds a special place in the hearts of travelers. The greatness of Vietnamese cuisine can be recognized by its tag as the Best Culinary Destination in the Bucket List Places in 2023 (Vietnamplus, 2023) or the presence of its two top-rated fabulous dishes in the Oxford Dictionary: “pho” and “banh my” (Vneconomy, 2023). Meanwhile, Vietnam’s booming food scene was acknowledged by the prestigious Michelin Guide with twenty-nine affordable priced restaurants, seventy selected restaurants/eateries, and four one-star restaurants (Vietnamplus, 2023). To meet the needs of tourists, a range of cooking teaching services has emerged and flourished, and Vietnam offers cooking tours, culinary courses and dining experiences such as cooking classes (Tapchidulich.net, 2010).

The research will focus on Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam and the city that is credited with creating Vietnamese cuisine. Every meal in Hanoi is regarded to be quite different from that in many Western countries because it is often very subtle and owns its unique local traditions (Nguyen, 2016). Tourists are sometimes taken aback when they learn about Vietnamese cuisine, particularly Hanoi cuisine because each dish contains a wealth of cultural and aesthetic significance dish. Hanoi honorary ranked first in the 2024 Culinary Destination rankings voted by TripAdvisor users, outtopped other major cities such as Rome (Italy), Crete (Greece) and Cusco (Peru) (TripAdvisor, n.d.).

In this context, and with the aim of exploring the intersections between gastronomy tourism, memorable food experiences, and the cultural impact of cooking classes in the context of Vietnamese cuisine this study proposes the following research questions:

1. How do cooking classes contribute to the overall memorable food experiences (MFEs) of tourists visiting Hanoi, Vietnam?
2. What are the key elements that make cooking classes in Hanoi memorable for international visitors?
3. To what extent do interactive cooking classes enhance tourists' understanding and appreciation of Vietnamese cuisine and culture?
4. How can cooking class providers in Hanoi improve their services to create more enriching and memorable food experiences for tourists?

As mentioned previously, this research generally aims to provide valuable insights into the factors that make gastronomy tourism experiences in Vietnam truly unforgettable, specifically focusing on the cooking class context, from the perspective of the visitors themselves. Its particular

goals encompass identifying the components of MFEs, pinpointing different elements. By understanding what aspects of the experience stood out to them, we are able to gain insights into which elements are more significant in shaping MFEs. A content analysis approach was adopted to analyze and gauge the perceptions and preferences of tourists who have participated in Vietnamese cooking classes by using customer reviews on TripAdvisor – the world’s largest travel community (Barsky & Frame, 2009). Ultimately, this research aspires to provide actionable recommendations for culinary tourism providers, cooking class instructors, and destination marketers. By elucidating the key ingredients of unforgettable food experiences, it aims to help stakeholders in the tourism industry in Vietnam enhance their offerings and create more enriching and memorable experiences for tourist interested in exploring Vietnamese cuisine.

The following sections lay the groundwork for this analysis by reviewing the literature on terms related to memorable gastronomy experience, cooking class and an overview of Vietnamese gastronomy tourism. Following that, a brief presentation of the study context and methodology conducted throughout the research will be shown. Later on, the findings of the data analysis process are demonstrated. Afterwards, we presented a discussion showing an in-depth explanation of our result. And finally, we conclude with some limitations of this study as well as implications for future cooking class offers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gastronomy and tourism

Gastronomy is emerging as one of the key elements for the development and promotion of tourist destinations. Lopez-Guzman et al. (2016) confirmed the importance of gastronomy as part of the tourist’s experience and the positive outcome of their satisfaction with the cultural destinations. Interestingly, there is some variation in the definition of this type of travel with different terms such as food tourism, culinary tourism and gastronomy tourism. Food tourism is defined by Hall and Mitchell (2001, p. 208) as “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 region are primary motivating factor for travel (Hall & Mitchell, 2004). On the other hand, Long (2004, p. 20) was the first to state that “Culinary tourism is about food; it is about individuals exploring foods new to them as well as using food to explore new cultures and ways of being”. Additionally, Santich (2004) interpreted gastronomy tourism as

tourism or travel motivated at least in part by an interest in eating and drinking. The reason these terms are referring to the same type of tourism is due to language and cultural differences (Nistor & Dezsi, 2022). However, despite the different interpretations of the words, the concept of food/culinary/gastronomy tourism remains quite consistent in as much as is a type of food-related products and activities while traveling (UNWTO, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, the concept of gastronomy tourism or food/culinary tourism will be used interchangeably.

Gastronomy tourism or food tourism have evolved into a dynamic and influential segment of the travel industry, reflecting the growing interest of people in exploring the world through its diverse culinary traditions. Good cuisine is interesting for everybody, as everyone wants to try good and tasty food (Tovmasyan, 2019). The relationship between gastronomy and culture was emphasized by Santich (2004) and Yigit (2002), who contended that gastronomy tourism is a way to engage with a place through food and gain access to cultural heritage. Findings from Lin et al. (2021) support the linkage between gastronomy tourism and heritage, and it can be seen as a way to preserve cultural assets (Ovcharenko et al., 2021). Indeed, for travelers, sampling local cuisine offers an opportunity to explore new aspect of culture and traditions of the destination.

Food is seen as more than just a basic tangible product that satisfies a person's basic needs or that offers every customer the standardized service; it also has intangible values that benefit suppliers as well as consumers (OECD, 2012). To the supplier, local cuisine plays a critical role in destination attractiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) and differentiates one destination from the others (OECD, 2012). In the eyes of consumers, food plays an integral role in determining travel destinations and experiences (Okech & Timothy, 2023, p. 165). Not to mention high-quality culinary experiences play a crucial role in ensuring their satisfaction, enhancing quality of life, and fostering loyalty (Hernandez-Mongollon et al, 2020; Marine-Roig et al., 2023). Additionally, the study of Sthapit et al. (2019) resulted in a positive correlation between tourist's subjective well-being and their memories of eating local food, which means that satisfaction with a trip affects other life domains, which in turn influence an individual's overall life satisfaction. In the report about the state of the food travel industry, Stone and his co-researchers (2020) pointed out the positive impacts of food and drink aspect in meeting both visitors and residents/locals' expectations. That being said, understanding the co-relation between food/drink and tourism along with the emerging popularity of gastronomy tourism, we believe that there is a need for further investigation into this relationship.

2.2. From gastronomy experience to memorable food experience

According to Williams et al. (2019), memorable moments during travel are associated with one or more of the following stages: planning, travelling, reflecting and experiencing. Kim et al (2012, p. 13) defined memorable tourism experience (MTE) as “a tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred”. Their study found that individuals who closely experience local culture are more likely to have MTEs. Accordingly, tourist who perceive a tourism experience as memorable would often recall the seven dimensions of the Memorable Tourism Experience, i.e. hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge. Indeed, novel events or features are most likely to be remembered (Stone et al., 2017). On the other hand, Larsen (2007) assured that events that stand out or are distinctive are among the events that people actually can recall as well. By supporting this perspective, Oh et al. (2007) tested the linking path between aspects of experience (using Pine and Gilmore’s four realms of experience (1999)) and memories; afterward they found that only the aesthetic realm is dominant for a memorable experience. Research by Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) showed that only aesthetic and education experiences positively impact tourist’s memories. Therefore, memorable experience encounters enhance visitors’ capacity to recall and possibly recreate the event, as they contribute to visitors’ memories of the place. According to Stone et al. (2017) studies on the memorable food/drink experiences, memorable tourism experiences in general have primarily considered a destination or trip as a whole, but individual elements such as dining or drinking (all part of the food experience) are the source of many memories.

In today’s marketing world, the marketing of destinations is a complex phenomenon (Sormaz et al., 2016) due to the difficulty of different purposes and expectations; local cuisines are unique sources to develop. The need to create distinctive and memorable food experiences is getting more attractive to service providers. Offering unforgettable and one-of-a-kind experiences seems to become more important than primarily providing a service (Gupta & Sharma, 2023). Interestingly, recent evidence has shown that those who travel for memorable food and drink experiences believe in stronger connections between travel experience and memory than other leisure travellers (Stone et al., 2021). Stone and co-researchers (2017) previously came up with a framework including food/drink, location/setting, companions, occasion and tourist elements; all of these elements were meant to measure aspects that may impact MFEs.

Sthapit (2017) identified MFEs as multidimensional, including the following key components: taste, authenticity, novelty, togetherness, social interaction, hospitality, and servicescape. MFEs extend beyond food and people, involving factors like cost (Sthapit et al., 2020). Co-creations value, where tourists actively participate, enhances these experiences (Carvalho et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2023). Authenticity and cultural distinctiveness are key components (Anton et al., 2019), while eudaimonia (happiness and well-being) positively influences tourist's intentions to revisit (Lin et al., 2023), i.e., when tourists derive meaningfulness and accomplishment from local food consumption, they are likely to revisit the destination and recommend it to their social network. Badu-Baiden and his co-researchers (2023) highlighted how tourists remember the novelty of local cuisine, their educational experiences, and sensory aspects such as taste. Price, value, and even the table booking process also contribute to unforgettable memories (Nowacki et al., 2023). MFEs are diverse and may include perspectives beyond those covered in previous literature. Nonetheless, this study focuses specifically on MFEs in the context of cooking class activities.

2.3. Cooking class and memorable food experience

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO.org, n.d.) gastronomy tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes. Indeed, the industry of gastronomy tourism does not consist only of food guides and restaurants, but covers any kind of culinary experience (Sormaz et al., 2016). While travelling, cultural learning is a direct outcome of attending a cooking class (Qian et al, 2023). A resource that can draw in tourists is food, like the foodies whose decision to travel are heavily influenced by their desire to sample local specialties, learn about local culinary traditions and experiment with new cooking techniques (Hernandez-Mongollon et al, 2020). At some points, cooking classes were inclined to approach tourists who have already got some knowledge or understanding of local gastronomy and might aspire to discover it seriously by learning how to prepare and perform the dishes (Le & Hoang, 2020). However, to seek out more distinctive and unforgettable experiences, travelers have expanded beyond eating to encompass more interactive, participatory and activity-based experiences (Suntikul et al., 2020). Yet, the aim of touristic cooking schools is to create an experience through a memorable event (Azavedo, 2019). Moreover, Yigit (2022) suggested that learning how to produce food, the technique used and the

narrative behind food might leave a more positive and memorable impression in traveler's memories.

Consuming authentic food and drinks can be one of the main motives for traveling. Thus, these tangible products can, in turn, affect tourists' senses and transform them from observers to active participants (Okumus & Chang, 2022). However, cooking class providers tend to use their "own resources" to attract tourists. Kvalsvik (2017) identified five factors that shape the authentic meal experience at a cooking class in Bali: traditional market tour, family compound, cooking techniques, storytelling, customs and the local chef/staffs. In the context of online cooking classes, Seyitoglu and Atsiz (2022) concluded that any negative perception related to one component of distant gastronomic experience can heavily influence participant's overall experience. Annear and Harris (2018) say the main focus of the cooking school experience is letting customers cook and eat "authentic Vietnamese foods". Moreover, it is "not unusual for a cooking class to start with a visit to the market to purchase ingredients" (Annear & Harris, 2018). In fact, cooking classes provide education and entertainment aspects (edutainment) and foster tourists' cognitive involvement in food tours and other food-related experience (Carvalho et al., 2023). Despite its potential, the memorable aspect of tourists' experiences in the cooking classes context is still under-explored (Yigit, 2022; Qian et al., 2023; Atsiz et al., 2024).

2.4. The case of Vietnamese gastronomy tourism

From having very few foreign visitors in the early 1990s, Vietnam's tourism industry has grown to be a significant part of the country's economy (Hansen et al, 2023). According to the Vietnamese General Statistics Office (GSO) in 2022, over 3.66 million international visitors traveled to Vietnam (Vietnamtourism, 2023). South Korean tourists made up the largest source market, with American tourists coming in second. In fact, the neighboring Asia region accounted the most for 71% of the total international visitor arrivals to Vietnam, followed by America and Europe.

The concept of culinary tourism has gained popularity recently in Vietnam's top tourist destinations, such as Hanoi, Hoi An, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh city (Nhan Dan, 2019). Therefore, gastronomy tourism is on the increase as baby boomers flood the marketplace in Vietnam. A number of studies have contributed to the body of knowledge regarding Vietnamese cuisines and food tourism in Vietnam (Avieli, 2011, 2013; Pham, 2021; Hansen et al., 2023).

Hanoi emerged as the cultural heart of the Vietnamese nation as a result of political processes, with the communist government successfully positioning itself as the embodiment of authentic Vietnamese values (Logan, 2009). Hanoi has always been a “top place to go” in Vietnam thanks to its history, culture, monuments and possess most of Vietnam’s famous dishes (Suanpang, 2015). The significance of Hanoi’s cuisine was outlined in the literature, such as Thach Lam with his frequently quoted book *Ha Noi Bam Sau Pho Phuong* (“Hanoi’s Thirty-Six Guild Streets”) published in 2018, or Vu Bang who is known for his special book *Mon Ngon Ha Noi* (“The Specialities of Hanoi”) in 2014 and Nguyen Tuan whose essays occasionally mention Hanoi’s flavor. These three authors contribute to the narratives about Hanoi tradition and identity (Tran, 2022). Hanoi was also recognized and highlighted in Asia’s Best Emerging Culinary City Destination 2023 by World Culinary Awards, Top 20 Culinary Destination in 2023 by TripAdvisor (Hanoimoi. Vn, 2023). To turn Vietnamese food into a desirable tourism product, Hanoi’s Department of Tourism has organized annual events like periodic street food fairs or traditional food festivals in craft villages, attracting international visitors and promoting cross-cultural exchange. Many tourists visit Hanoi to experience its cuisine in different forms, such as street food tours, street food tours with motorbike/cycle, and coffee workshop. Cooking classes, however, are by far the most popular type of culinary tourism experience of them all.

3. Methodology

This section presents the primary method for gathering and analyzing data to discover the MFEs of tourists participating in cooking class activities in Hanoi. The following sections provide an overview of the study context and a descriptive explanation of the data collection and analysis process.

3.1. Study context

The study’s central point is Rose Kitchen cooking class, which ranks as the best cooking class in Hanoi according to TripAdvisor. Rose Kitchen offers an enriching experience that allows visitors to delve into the heart of Vietnamese culinary traditions, creating a memorable and educational journey for food enthusiasts of all levels.

The class has a fixed menu with six signature dishes of Vietnam. Each class starts with a local market tour, where tourists can immerse themselves in the various products and locally sourced ingredients while actively participating in trading and buying. After the market tour, tourists will go directly to the kitchen and start preparing the dishes with guidance from an expert chef. At the end of each class, tourists can sit down to savor the dishes and bond with the other participants from class (Rosekitchen.com, n.d.).

Rose Kitchen adjusts their offer depending on the visitor's interest and preference, as such vegans and vegetarians or adherents of specific religions like Muslims and Hindus (Rosekitchen.com, n.d.). This demonstrates the Rose Kitchen staff's consideration and hospitality in providing such a wide choice of classes, and possibly a willingness to capture more tourists.

3.2. Methods

Since the contemporary digital landscape, the internet has evolved into paramount domain for conducting research. A lot of websites let users contribute their own content in the form of text comments, images and videos. This type of content is known as User Generated Contents (UGCs) - which has become a major source of information for travel consumers (Ayeh et al., 2013). These user-generated platforms are intended to serve as Online Reviews (electronic recommendations and experience sharing) and electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) (Soteriades & Zyl, 2013). In the meantime, customers are becoming more adept at utilizing a variety of techniques to research goods or services online before making a purchase (Burgess et al., 2009), and yet the more reliable the reviews the more likely they consider as a good purchase (Ayeh et al., 2013).

This study employs a content analysis method to thoroughly comprehend and identify the components of MFEs in Rose Kitchen, pinpointing its different elements. Hopefully, this will allow us to understand the memorable aspects of tourists over their gastronomy experiences in Hanoi and Vietnam.

Content analysis is a research method that uses a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns to make valid inference interpretation from text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The conventional content analysis was generally conducted on various forms of human communication including permutations of written documents, photographs, films, video/audiotapes (Berg & Lune, 2014). It is an ideal methodology for verifying trends and patterns

in documents, not to mention its features of “being unobtrusive and being useful in dealing with large volumes of data” (Stemler, 2000). This approach has become increasingly popular when deriving theoretical and structural models from review data on social media (Qiu & Zhang, 2021). Additionally, content analysis is the most frequently used analytical procedure in five topic areas: service quality, destination image, experiences, tourist behavior, and eWOM (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015) and data collected and analyzed from User-Generated Contents (UGCs). For the purpose of this study, we decided to use TripAdvisor as the ideal online platform in order to gain a better insight into consumer’s perception and experiences. Besides, this share-economy platform is well-known thanks to its reputation and recognition by tourists and travel platforms and is also the most frequently used peer-to-peer social media platform (Gursoy et al., 2021).

In conjunction with the content analysis approach, we use grounded theory traditionally applied in social sciences. According to Khan (2014), studies using grounded theory approach are essentially a step toward conceptual thinking and theory building even without empirically testing the theory. Additionally, the grounded theory approach allows the researchers to remain open during the research process with a high level of flexibility and adaptability. That being said, we believe that the use of grounded theory method can underscore new items that have not been found, contributing to the pertinent literature.

3.3. Data collection and examination

The visitor’s statements or texts were sourced from TripAdvisor. The study includes only comments written in English. Reviews in multiple languages, such as English and Korean, were considered but only the English sections were analyzed.

The period was first set from April 2022 to March 2024; before 2022, Vietnam closed its borders for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the focus for the current study is the post-pandemic period. The reviews were manually computed on an Excel spreadsheet to conduct a comprehensive analysis and ensure that all the reviews were collected. Related information was included in different columns such as: Name, Type of Group, Location, Rating, Review Title, Review Context, Date. The location was formatted to only include the country. In order to ensure the credibility of the data source, the names of the reviewers remained the same, and typos were not adjusted.

In order to dig deeper into the central theme, a mixed development of codes was used, including the deductive and inductive processes. A coding frame with deductively formed codes was created, primarily based on the memorable gastronomy experience theoretical framework or previous research. This mix of concept-driven and data-driven approaches allows a thorough exploration of data by validating existing theories while also uncovering new patterns from the data set.

The data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively. The data was initially collected until December 2023, resulting in 754 reviews (n=754). Following this, the main researcher carefully read and created a list of codes from the first twenty reviews as a preliminary approach. Later on, two other independent researchers read the first twenty reviews and confirmed the existing code frame. After importing the dataset of 754 reviews to NVivo, data was inductively categorized into different themes and sub-themes by developing the abovementioned code frame. During this stage, we observed that the saturation point – where additional data no longer yielded new insights – was reached earlier than anticipated, well before the planned time of March 2024. Recognizing this, we decided to stop gathering further data and prioritize the already gathered dataset. This approach allowed us to optimize resources and ensure a thorough examination of the existing data without redundancies.

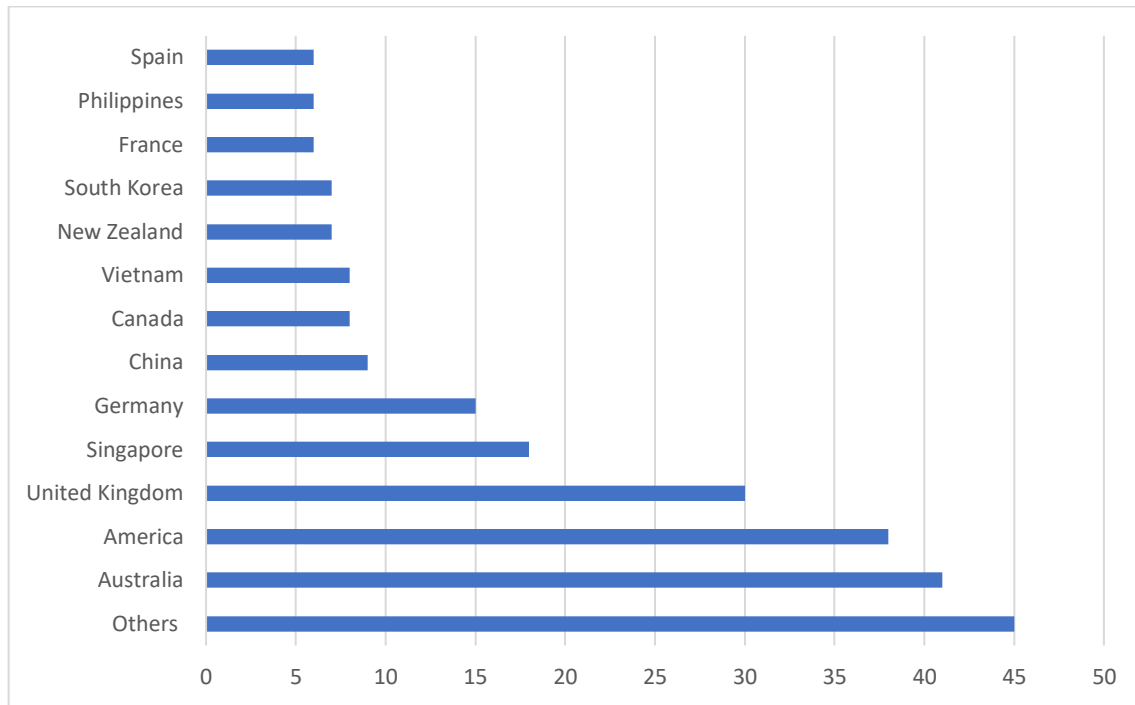
4. Findings

Ratings provide a sense of quality over a set scale. In other words, TripAdvisor allows travelers to submit their star ratings on a scale from 5 (Excellent) to 1 (Terrible). Out of 754 reviews (n=754), there were 745 reviews with 5 stars rating, accounted for 98,81%. Reviews 4 star make up 0,93% of reviews with 7 comments; reviews 1 to 2 stars account for only 0,13% with 1 comment each; additionally, no 3-star reviews were found. These ratings demonstrate Rose Kitchen Cooking Class's positive standing in the Vietnamese food tourism sector, which explains why it unsurprisingly continues to hold the top spot among Hanoi's top cooking class.

The distribution of reviews per nationality shows a strong interest from Australia, followed by the United States and the United Kingdom, possibly because only review written in English were collected (see Figure 1). Countries with a total of five or less reviews were grouped into the category "Others", which includes countries such as Austria, Brazil, Denmark, and Italy, amongst others.

Figure 1

Reviewers' nationalities



Another aspect that is worth mentioning is review's heading. A word cloud was generated for the initial analysis of the descriptive headings (Figure 2). The most used words among the reviewers are Cooking/Cooked/Cooks with 231 occurrences, followed by Experience/Experiment (213 occurrences), Class (183 occurrences), Great (156 occurrences), Hanoi (98), Fun and Amazing (90) and (68) occurrences respectively. These few words indicate that participants after experiencing the cooking class, they likely think it is pleasant and enjoyable and it causes them to feel satisfied and happy, somewhat was proved by the high rate of the following words: Great, Amazing and Fun.

Figure 2

Word clouds of review's headings



Fifteen themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) authenticity, (2) class size, (3) food dimensions, (4) future behavior, (5) guide/chef's contribution, (6) hospitality, (7) hygiene aspects, (8) knowledge dimensions, (9) novelty, (10) personalization, (11) quantity of foods, (12) solo travel fitted, (13) space & settings, (14) sense of community and (15) value/price. The number of occurrences along with ratio and example for each theme is presented in appendix 1.

As advised by Morgan and Nica (2020), presenting too many themes makes it hard for reader to follow them all and the analysis may lose coherence; it is therefore recommended to identify and focus on a relatively small number of key themes with regards to the nature of qualitative research. Therefore, we chose 5% as the cutting point, which means that any themes below this ratio were not considered. As such, from the initial 15 themes listed above, we shortlisted the 8 themes with more than 5% of occurrences: (1) authenticity, (2) food dimensions, (3) future behaviors, (4) guide/chef's contribution, (5) hospitality, (6) knowledge dimensions, (7) space & settings and (8) sense of community.

In the following page, each theme will be analyzed individually according to its sub-categories and its number of occurrences. In order to provide a more reliable analysis, a direct quote from the data collection was presented under the name reference (ref) and its respective number, an example of the reference is shown in appendix 2.

Guide/Chef 's Contribution

As found by Sahin and his co-researchers (2011), a guide plays a crucial role in introducing the national kitchen and food culture to tourist who wish for a novel and cultural experience. That can explain why there were 614 comments regards to the contribution of the guide/chef in participant's cooking class experience, accounted for 25,21% of the overall occurrences, staying on the first place of the dimension distribution. The analysis show that the guide appears to act various roles, from the cultural expert and communicator to the expert guide and the inspiring leader (see Table 1).

Table 1

Guide/Chef's contribution's sub-themes and number of occurrences (in alphabetic order)

Guide/Chef's Contribution	
Cultural expert and communicator	73
Engaging instructor	133
English proficiency	32
Enthusiasm	19
Expert guidance	166
Great cooker	18
Helpful assistance	101
Inspiring leadership	38
Professional	34
Total number of occurrences	614

Stone et al. (2021. p.2) stated that “food alone is not always enough to establish a memorable experience”. Indeed, enjoying delicious food or preparing that food is not, or cannot be the only way to connect the traveler to the destination. In fact, a narrator that deeply understands about the destination's culture and tradition is paramount. Interestingly, some reviews did not even mention the food itself or any other aspect except for the guide or little did they talk about it, as illustrated below:

Ruby is a delightful host, teacher and chef who is very knowledgeable. She explains things well, peppered with stories from her experience. From the market tour to buy ingredients, she also taught us about traditions observed by Vietnamese, how and why the market has 2 opening hours and certain practices. When we got to cooking, she clearly explained not only the how, but the why we do certain things. For example – freezing pork to make it easier to slice. (ref. 208)

In agreement with Amaro and Duque (2022), the tour guide was the crucial element for a truly remarkable food tour. By sharing stories and the historical contexts behind the dishes, the guide help visitors understand the cultural significance of what they are preparing. In the view of participants, moreover, a guide who has a thorough understanding of both the cuisine and culture of their nation is highly advantageous.

Nonetheless, a kitchen host with a super active interaction with participants is an indispensable factor, which can in turn make learning engaging and memorable to tourists. A genuinely inspired guide can ensure that everyone feels included and excited about the culinary adventure by being able to adapt to the group's energy and preferences, keeping participants engaged and interested throughout the experience, as the following extract illustrates one review “Dana was a perfect host throughout the day! She looked after us so well and even gave my wife who had become unwell some special tea and honey” (ref. 105). Certainly, a special treat or personalized offer from the guide can win the tourists over.

To ensure the quality of service, there must be mutual understanding between the host and the participant. English has become a universal language, so it is now more important than ever for workers in the tourism industry to improve their language abilities in order to fully serve the needs of visitors (Gani & Damayanti, 2018). In the context of cooking class activities, the need for mutual understanding is crucial and the guide serve as a bridge between participants with the rest of the class and local people. In this case, the English proficiency of the guide from the Rose Kitchen Cooking Class is highly assessed: “With excellent English she guided us through the market to shop for our main ingredient” (ref. 280); “Ruby was a very dedicated host and also well spoken in English so she could explain very well and answer all our questions” (ref. 120).

Authenticity

As an important element to reach the satisfaction and memorability of the tourist, authenticity immerses itself in the tourist’s experience by its pureness and its true to tradition. Authenticity is often defined by the personal definition of the tourist (Stone et al., 2017). The elements contributing to the authenticity dimension can be seen in Table 2, which considers cooking/preparing food from scratch, immersing in a cultural environment, observing the real spirit of people or experiencing an ancient technique.

Table 2

Authenticity's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Authenticity	
Authentic ambience	4
Authentic culinary experience	16
Cultural immersion	28
Genuine ingredients or product	40
Traditional techniques	14
True to tradition	68
Total number of occurrences	170

It was shown that the more intensely tourist participates in an activity or event, the more clearly that activity is characterized as authentic and memorable (William et al., 2015). In gastronomy tourism, genuine products play a particularly important role, regional initiative and values are reflected in the diversity of local products (Chaigasem & Tunming, 2019). In such case, Vietnamese people have long favored fresh produce, vegetables and meat of the day which they consider fresher, more flavorful and taste better. Though there is a difference in the purchasing behaviors between Vietnam and Western countries, many of the reviews expressed their joy of getting ingredients from a wet market in Vietnam, as referred in ref. 61: “You start the tour by going to get all of the ingredients for your meal at the local market. And you truly get all your ingredients at the market which is really cool.”. The active chain of going to the market, buying products and heading back to kitchen to prepare a meal also take part in the authenticity of traveler’s experience:

“...I figure a nice authentic meal where we had the ability to partake in selecting the ingredients and making the meal was worth over any restaurant experience...” (ref. 303).

Visitors immerse into local life, observe and partake in their daily life, taste their local dishes; these can truly highlight their connection with local people and at the same time, enhance tourists’ satisfaction. Going to a local market, interacting with local people and learning about their way of life are a wonderful way to foster a sense of connection with the local community and add to tourists’ understanding of the local lifestyle. how local people surround travelers, listen to their local language, and experiment with local food creates a sense of authenticity and belonging (Gursoy et al., 2021). Moreover, the way the guide brings back traditional cooking technique along with all the valuable skills that have been passed down for generations to participant, also plays a crucial role in bringing a sense of legitimacy to participant.

Ruby was amazing and had some really good tips I’d never heard of before. Tips that she had gotten from her Mum and were really clever. I won’t tell you but you need to go and find out for yourself. (ref. 184)

Knowledge dimensions

Attending a cooking class in a travel destination offers a rich and multifaceted knowledge outcome, contributing significantly to a memorable gastronomy experience. Travel represents an opportunity to learn about places, people and self, in the form of newly acquired practical skills, knowledge, practical wisdom and self-consciousness (McKercher & du Cross, 2002). Taking a cooking class provides tourists with knowledge to understand local customs and develop skills in preparing or cooking food (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021; Yigit, 2022). As shown in Table 3, the core outcome of attending a cooking class is the acquisition of knowledge about the culinary itself (see Table 3).

Table 3

Knowledge's dimension's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Knowledge Dimensions	
Culinary learning	131

Culinary tips and tricks	39
Cultural learning	67
Ingredients learning	33
Recipe at the end	52
Total number of occurrences	322

Local cuisine stands for the cultural image of a destination and reflects many of its heritage dimensions, and it is a fundamental component of the tourism experience (Ghanem, 2019). During the participation, visitors learn about the history, influences, and traditions that shape the dishes they prepare. This type of knowledge provides context and meaning to the cooking process, helps participants appreciating the unique characteristic of the regional cuisine. Some were really excited when they finally know how to create dishes that they had eaten during their vacation in Vietnam: “It was time to know how make the Vietnamese food that I ate during my trip...” (ref. 12).

The appreciation of knowledge gaining at the wet market was praised so many times, one reviewer described:

She first brought us to a local market to buy ingredients and she taught us how to choose a good meat/vegetables, taught us what certain foods were like... and taught us random things when walked by them... she taught us about how the vermicelli noodles were fresh made daily and how to tell if it’s gone bad (ref. 315)

It is undeniable that participants can gain a lot of useful tips and tricks not only for cooking but also for shopping around Vietnam, especially in a local scape like the wet market. This can encourage them to seek out and experiment with novelty ingredients and experience. As shown by Luoh et al. (2020), providing an explanation of local ingredients and their uses in cooking and the best way to purchase them can improve tourist’s understanding of local culinary practices, which in turn, provides a more memorable and fun experience.

At the end of every class, Rose Kitchen offers to participants a PDF file with full of recipe of Vietnamese dishes including what they have made of the day. In this way, it is certainly an added bonus because it acts as a notebook that documents their hands-on learning and the enjoyable moments shared with fellow participants. Having a full recipe ensures that the knowledge gained is not forgotten and can be revisited, allowing the travelers to recall their memories whenever they recreate the dish at home. It can be seen as a “souvenir” and basically people cherish souvenirs

because of the memories attached on them (Lai & Deng, 2007). Somewhat it also helps spreading the diversity of Vietnamese cuisine to a more extend. “The cooking class itself is wonderful but after the class they send you the recipes for not only all of the dishes you made but a bunch of other recipes which is a great “bonus”!” (ref. 61)

Food dimensions

Rather than indulging in the final products through dining, the sensations blend and evolve as a result of the cooking process. As depicted in Table 4, the sensual stimulation is highlighted in the cooking class activity.

Table 4

Food dimension's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Food dimensions	
Delicious flavor	222
Fresh ingredients	14
Well-executed dishes	26
Total number of occurrences	262

Taste is a dominant role that shapes individuals’ cooking experiences (Aksenova et al., 2022). The sensual stimulation is always highlighted in the cooking class activities, especially the taste, which is a crucial dimension of a memorable cooking experience in instructor-based classes (Atsiz et al., 2024). The analysis reveals that reviewers frequently use adjectives such as “delicious”, “amazing”, “yummy”, “best food I’ve had”, “terrific”, “incredible”, “lovely”, “tasted great”, “glorious” to express their overall satisfaction with the food and its umami taste. These descriptors appeared consistently across various reviews, underscoring the positive reception of the cuisine. Despite the abovementioned aspect of the food, further review emphasized its high quality and fresh ingredients: “We got to have a fine meal made with fresh, fragrant ingredients that we made with our own hands” (ref. 542)

Sense of community

As mentioned above, cooking classes create an environment where individuals come and learn together, this will therefore be analyzed in detail in the section dedicated to sense of community. In this sense, the way reviewers participate, communicate and interact with other participants and staffs can significantly contribute to their memorable experience. Tourists who are more likely to participate actively and fully immerse themselves in the gastronomic experience tend to have more MFEs (Sthapit et al., 2021). The collaborative nature of cooking encourages participants to work closely with one another, by then fostering interpersonal connections. From the analysis, five components of sense of community were mentioned in the reviews as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Sense of community sub-themes and number of occurrences

Sense of community	
Bonding experience	48
Meet new people	31
Mutual learning	5
Shared success	28
Team collaboration	50
Total number of occurrences	162

Rose Kitchen cooking class normally caters for small cooking groups, allowing participants to have a more personalized, interactive and supportive environment. Reviewers referred a lot to the small dimension of the class as a bonus point “We could share a lot since we were a small group” (ref. 111). It indeed makes more sense to be in a small class size than in the big one as people can absorb more knowledge and interact more. Additionally, the guide can handle a smaller class with less effort. The way they share experience often leads to the new friendships, as participants engage in meaningful conversation and interaction throughout the class. Some even

posited cooking class as a family bonding as they take time to connect with their family members and improve their relationship by learning something new together.

This is the place where people are already talking and chatting with each other about something they have in common – cooking or travelling. Some comments admire how fantastic their group was and how they connect with each other even after the class was over. “...our group were fantastic people and we ended up making friends & going out for beers and karaoke til very late!” (ref. 45).

Despite the culinary knowledge acquired from the class, people can get useful tips and tricks from other travelers. That is the reason why it is important to highlight the mutual learning from this dimension as learning from other people can create a sense of belonging into the group, as stated in ref. 354: “By the end of the day we were all good friends and exchanged information and tips for travel and for Vietnam.”

After all the hard work, it is much more memorable when they can sit together and enjoy their accomplishment. The shared success of creating a delicious dish brings a tangible outcome that everyone can be proud of. It fosters a sense of accomplishment and unity, as participants celebrate their efforts and enjoy the fruit of their labor together, just like a family reunion. Now they are not an individual but a group of friends attending cooking class together “...and the best part was sitting down as a group to enjoy all of the food we had prepared...” (ref. 82).

Space and settings

This study found that the space and setting of the cooking class were important factors that enhance the memory of tourist’s food experiences. Number of occurrences in Table 6 has verified the affirmation of author.

Table 6

Space and setting's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Space and settings	
Aesthetic appeal	44

Scenic surrounding	4
Spacious and clean	44
Warm and welcoming atmosphere	35
Well-equipped facilities	17
Total number of occurrences	144

Firstly, the visual appeal enhances the overall experience, making it more enjoyable and unforgettable. Elements such as “beautiful private kitchen setup”, “cool vibe”, “beautifully decorated”, “very ambient and lovely designed”, “calm and nicely decorated villa”, “great photo spot”, “unique house off beaten track” or “spotless clean” contribute successfully to a positive ambience. Additionally, a warm atmosphere, a cozy setting, and a well-organized space make participant feel valued and at ease, fostering a sense of belonging and comfort.

As we exited the taxi street side, we were met by his sous chef, who led us through winding alleys, only to end up in the most idyllic, gorgeous private kitchen and dining set up. (ref. 14)

Since the class is only about Vietnamese cuisine, thus the authenticity element of the decors plays a vital role in attracting visitors. It sets visitor’s frame of mind that they are entering a what can so call “Vietnamese representative”. Plus, the cooking area is visually richer and aesthetically more pleasing with a sprinkle of its traditions and customs.

Hospitality

A great number of reviews demonstrate the hospitality and services in the first place of their comments, which are significant elements of memorable gastronomy experiences (see Table 7).

Table 7

Hospitality's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Hospitality	
Attentive service	39

Generous hospitality	52
Logistic	45
Warm welcome	7
Total number of occurrences	143

In most reviews, guide/chefs and staffs were evaluated as hospitable and helpful people. Such codes as “friendly and helpful the entire staffs”, “incredible hospitality and service”, “so very kind and such wonderful service”, “very considerate folds”, “all the staff was super friendly” are objected to the hospitality and service when it comes to the memorable gastronomy experiences. On the other hand, a good and attentive communication beforehand also take a crucial role in visitor’s experiences:

We booked the vegan course as we are 1 veggie and 1 vegan. They contact us immediately after booking to let us know they did not have enough vegans for a full course and would we like to rebook or do the vegan course alongside meat eaters, which we were happy to do. (ref. 139)

This detailed attention can be a great point in the eye of visitor who was being looked out and taken time to understand their needs and preferences. Good hospitality also means efficient and thoughtful management of transportation aspects. Traffic chaos is norm on the streets of many Asian cities but nowhere more so than Hanoi, Vietnam. By providing a smooth transportation from participant’s place to the class, Rose Kitchen helps participants enjoy fully the entire excursion without any frustrations or distractions. Ref. 240 was written “We were outside of the normal pickup area but the tour was extremely accommodating to our pick up and Ruby even ordered us our own car back to our hotel...”

Future behaviors

From Table 8, it is evident that reviewers frequently mentioned the outcome of the cooking class experiences. Almost all of the reviewers left the cooking class very happy and satisfied, which can be confirmed by the fact that they recommend the experience to others.

Table 8

Future behavior's sub-themes and number of occurrences

Future behaviors	
Recommendations	319
Recreate intention	37
Revisit intention	38
Total number of occurrences	394

Reviewers most of the times end their comments with statement such as “Huge recommendation”, “highly recommend this class”, “cannot recommend enough”, “definitely recommend taking these classes”. That being said., having a great time in a cooking class can encourage travelers to visit the same location again, a strong desire to return and expand their culinary knowledge may arise from these positive memories.

Furthermore, some reviewers expressed their gratitude and look forward to recreating the dishes that they have learnt at home. The skills gained from a cooking class may inspire them to experiment with different recipes and cooking techniques after their travel. When cooking class tourists practice and teach their family and friends the newly learnt cooking technique, they can be considered loyal in a different way than other tourism products where loyalty is all about going back to the previous product (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). It is no doubt that a memorable experience enhances their recreate intention and stimulates them to share the delicacy to other people.

We will never forget this incredible experience and can’t wait to try to being back to life back at home with the many recipes that were shared. (ref. 393)

5. Discussion

In addition to giving destination managers the chance to develop their tourism strategies, exploring and comprehending the elements of tourism memorable experience is essential for destination promotion. Since food and tourism have an inseparable relationship, culinary serves as a bridge between individuals of any part of the world with locals as a new gastronomic product (Litavniece et al., 2019). Cooking classes distinguish themselves from other form of food

experience by providing abundance of knowledge and skills acquisition along with involvement and interaction. This study's main goal was to understand how cooking classes contribute to the overall memorable experiences (MFEs) of tourists visiting Hanoi (RQ1), and therefore, we looked at UGCs – that is, comments or reviews – posted on TripAdvisor by tourists who had attended cooking classes. We also wanted to pinpoint the key elements that make cooking classes in Hanoi memorable for international visitors (RQ2) and the findings from the data analysis reveal eight primary themes: authenticity, food dimensions, future behaviors, guide/chef contribution, hospitality, knowledge dimensions, space and settings and sense of community. Most of these are in line with prior research on MFEs (Yigit et al.,2022; Stone et al.,2021; Sthapit et al.,2017; Anton et al.,2019; Atsiz et al.,2024), supporting the validity and findings of the research. For instance, our study concluded that “food/drink experiences with more elements are likely to be more memorable” (Stone et al., 2021), which is supported by the fact that each comment usually contains more than two components of MFEs, reflecting a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to the memorability.

Out of the eight dimensions, the guide/chef contributions presented more occurrences, reflecting their vital role in contributing to the visitor's memorable food experiences in cooking class and to enhancing tourists' understanding and appreciation of Vietnamese cuisine and culture (RQ3). Being a part of the service delivery and a crucial element, the guide has been recognized and praised for contributing to the memorable tourism experience in several studies (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Coelho et al. de Almeida, 2018). In the context of a cooking class activity, as this study has uncovered, they play different roles, such as cultural expert and communicator, expert guidance, helpful assistant, and inspiring leader. Moreover, we may conclude that for the Rose Kitchen Cooking Class, the human dimension is significantly more relevant than other aspects. The analysis, on the other hand, is consistent with Sahin et al. (2011), Amaro and Duque (2022) and Yigit (2020), whose studies praise the contribution of the guide/chef in the food tourism industry.

While traveling, authenticity is a key motivator and plays an essential role when visitors evaluate their travel experiences. Our study is in line with research from Gursoy and his co-researchers in 2021; we discovered how fascinating participants were when they had a chance to stroll around the wet market, immerse themselves in the local life, and practice the traditional cooking technique.

Data from the study shows that tasting and consuming food are indicators of traveler's MFEs. Reviewers' praise for the dish's flavor indicates they were generally pleased with the food and experience. This finding supports studies indicating that the sensory appeal - tasting local food was one of the primary motivations for them to take a trip or participate in food-related activities at the travel destination (Stone et al., 2017; Sthapit et al., 2020; Carvalho et al., 2023), and it can be seen as one of the most significant experiences of the visitor (Atsiz et al., 2024).

This study shows that being hospitable makes cooking classes more enjoyable by fostering a friendly, supportive, and encouraging atmosphere. By emphasizing personalized service, anticipating and satisfying consumer needs, and ensuring harmonious operation, staff can help transform a standard tourist food experience into a truly memorable one. This finding underscores that hospitality is the foremost factor in crafting MFEs, specifically the quality of service and staff (Williams et al., 2019; Nowacki et al., 2023).

A significant number of reviews mention knowledge as an aspect of their memorability of the experience, suggesting how the cooking class offers participants a range of different educational content, i.e., from gastronomy to tradition and customs, from purchasing ingredients at the market to gaining an understanding of the local way of life. In fact, getting to know the local food contributes remarkably to the learning of culture (Yigit, 2022) and the learning of the travel destination in general (Luoh et al., 2020). The study also affirms the "edutainment" (education + entertainment) as part of engaging and effective experiences (Carvalho et al., 2023).

How customers describe the cooking class venue shows its critical role in creating a lasting impression on the customer's memorability. A well-designed space that reflects the local culture and the aesthetic of an authentic setting can engage multiple senses and enrich their overall experience. As the physical environment can also stimulate sensory experiences (Kivela & Crotts, 2006), this study confirms the existence of the ambiance and settings of the cooking class premise to tourists' positive experiences (Sthapit et al., 2020), thus, providing insights into how cooking class providers in Hanoi can improve their services to create more enriching and memorable food experiences for tourists (RQ4).

This study uncovered the sense of community, which enhances travelers' enjoyment and creates lasting memories of their time in Vietnam. Most of the literature in the context of MFEs identifies sense of community or togetherness as a significant component to this kind of experience

(Sthapit et al., 2020; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Atsiz et al., 2024; Shoukat et al., 2023). As such, this study contributes dimensionality and diversity to the already existing literature.

Finally, a memorable gastronomy experience could potentially have an impact on visitors' future behavior, as evidenced by the large number of comments recommending and urging future visits, which is similar to findings elsewhere (Anton et al., 2019; Badu-Baiden et al., 2023; Carvalho et al., 2023; Atsiz et al., 2024). Therefore, a memorable food experience can support tourists' loyalty (Hernandez-Mongollon et al., 2020) and popularize the gastronomic product (Seyitoglu & Atsiz, 2022). Furthermore, this study also affirms that recreation intention is worthy of attention. By replicating or sharing their newly learned recipe with others and possibly adding new techniques into their daily life, tourists can continue to enjoy and share their culinary discoveries long after their trip has ended. This reinforces their connection to the destination and enriches their everyday lives with new flavors and cultural experiences, potentially conducive to positive subjective well-being (Baidu-Baiden et al., 2023).

6. Conclusions

Our study successfully addresses the primary research questions within the context of cooking classes activities in Vietnam. Additionally, it also makes a significant contribution to the body of research on tourist experiences in gastronomy tourism and shed some lights to the literature of the memorable food experiences, an area that remains undiscovered (Atsiz et al., 2024).

The analysis leads to the following key conclusions: authenticity, food dimensions, guide/chef contributions, hospitality, knowledge dimensions, space & settings and sense of community are the sources of MFEs of tourist participating in cooking class activity in Vietnam. Ideally, the guide/chef contributions stand out, accounting for a significant proportion of occurrences (25,21%). This finding should be replicated in a study where human dimension is the corpus of the participatory activity in the gastronomy tourism context. In addition, these findings provide additional information about the effect of memorable food experience which potentially influence the future behaviors namely recommendations, revisit intentions and recreate intentions. Our results provide a basis for businesses and cooking classes organizers, enabling them to enhance their services by focusing on creating authentic, personalized, and immersive experiences. Further details on these recommendations are provided in the following section.

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations; firstly, our study focused on the cooking class context in Vietnam, so bias is unavoidable, as the principal researcher is Vietnamese. Future research can expand the study by investigating memorable food experiences in a broader geographic context or by comparing findings across different countries. Secondly, we only collected data in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. However, future scholars may research to identify different perspectives from tourists in two separate periods, e.g., pre and post-pandemic.

7. Implications for future cooking class offer

This study has several managerial implications for businesses and organizations involved in culinary tourism. Service providers have a responsibility to guarantee that cooking lessons accurately reflect and promote the authenticity aspect of the cooking class. This can include the act of utilizing regional ingredients, traditional cooking technique and creating an authentic ambient. By becoming aware that Vietnamese culture is really rich and diverse, service providers should use this as an advantage and show visitors the way of eating, cooking, shopping habits, etc. Our study indicates that a guide/chef has a major impact, the business manager therefore should hire not only a well-qualified but also an affable, interesting, and culturally aware guide since he/she is a bridge between each participant and the rest of the class, and the tourist destination. As we have seen, a meaningful interaction with local people is also an added bonus since sometimes it is difficult for a foreigner to have real conversation while travelling because of the language barrier. Also, the reviews show that mingling with other travelers in a cooking class creates a sense of community for each person, businesses or organizations may organize extra evening activities after the cooking class to maximize the companionship and to divulge the well-known Vietnamese “late night activities”. Finally, strong support for the locals can be advantageous. Examples include using local food ingredients and cooking utensils and organizing a local house as a teaching escape, which could potentially help ensure the sustainability and growth of the culinary tourism industry in the region.

8. Bibliography

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1. Themes from the content analysis process

Theme	Number of occurrences	Ratio	Example
Authenticity	170	6,84%	"The market was a great start and I felt like I got a true local experience." (ref. 5-Australia)
			"... You could see all the process of making a Vietnamese dinner: going to the fresh local market to buy the ingredients and then cooking them..." (ref. 48)
			"Ruby was amazing and had some really good tips I'd never heard of before. Tips that she had gotten from her Mum and were really clever. I won't tell you but you need to go and find out for yourself." (ref. 184-Australia)
Class Size	28	1,12%	"...and group size was good." (ref. 95)
			"The group wasn't too big (8 for us) so you never feel left out of the experience and get to participate in a bit of everything" (ref. 263)
Food Dimensions	262	10,54%	"The food was some of the best we had in Vietnam..." (ref. 56-Australia)
			"Time flies by and then you eat the BEST meal. It was truly so good..." (ref. 61)
			"The food tasted even better than we could have imagined..." (ref. 113)
Future Behavior	394	15,86%	"We highly recommend this class to everyone who wants to learn about the food and culture of Hanoi!" (ref. 2-USA)
			"I'm excited to take the recipe back home to Australia and share with friends and family!" (ref. 45-Australia)
			"If I come to Hanoi next time, I want to do it again." (ref. 58)
Guide's Contributions	614	24,71%	"From start to finish it was brilliant, got lots of explanations around the markets then to the massive kitchen where Simon completely looked after us, he taught us new techniques and showed us how to create amazing Vietnam dishes!" (ref. 9)
			"Dana is an excellent cook, guide, and instructor. We really wanted to walk into the market, but felt a little uncertain because we don't speak the language. Dana was a great guide, helping us understand the market culture and rhythms" (ref. 100-USA)
			"Fantastic tour through the green market and cooking class with chef Ruby! She took lots of time to explain all sorts of vegetables and fruits and designed the menu we prepared according to our Veggie preferences. Cooking with her was great fun and we learned some tricks which we will try at home (like how not to cry when chopping an onion:). (ref. 146)
Hospitality	143	5,75%	"What I also liked is that they let us do all the things that can be done fast, but took care of more time consuming things (like grilling meat for bun cha)" (ref. 20-Singapore)
			"We had great contact once we booked and a prompt hotel pick up." (ref. 132-Singapore)

Theme	Number of occurrences	Ratio	Example
			"We booked the vegan course as we are 1 veggie and 1 vegan. They contacted us immediately after booking to let us know they didnt have enough vegans for a full course and would we like to rebook or do the vegan course alongside meat-eaters, which we were happy to do and they were incredibly conscious of avoiding any cross contamination and had loads of choice for us." (ref. 139-Ireland)
Hygiene Aspects	8	0,32%	"The staff (Dana) prioritised hygiene and we were instructed to wash our hands to avoid any contamination frequently." (ref. 87)
Knowledge Dimensions	322	12,96%	"We cooked 3 different dishes, banana flower salad, famous pho and my favorite banh xeo and Simon gave me all the tips to cook it perfectly. I also now have the secret recipe of the so good egg coffee." (ref. 46)
			"It was also amazing to learn so much about the Vietnam history and traditions while talking to Ruby. Therefore, this course doesn't teach you only how to cook, but gives you a great intro into Vietnam culture!" (ref. 145)
			"We had a great time learning about the products in the market and how to buy them." (ref.295-Australia)
			"...and finally getting all the yummy recipes downloaded if you like." (ref. 400)
Novelty	114	4,58%	"We loved visiting the market and seeing so many fresh and unusual things." (ref. 2-USA)
			"Beginning with the tour of the local market, we got to shop for fresh ingredients first hand. I felt that this was one of the hidden merits of the program, since the local market can be quite intimidating for first time travelers of Vietnam." (ref. 542)
Personalization	55	2,21%	"They were very accomodating for my vegetarian needs without letting the other participants miss out on what they wanted which is always a plus." (ref. 55)
Quantity of Foods	29	1,16%	"...It was truly so good and you leave so full!", "huge meal", "a lot of it", "plenty", "stuffed" (ref. 61)
Solo Traveler Fitted	8	0,32%	"The small group was inclusive and cozy, and good for solo travellers." (ref. 530)
Space & Settings	144	5,80%	"The class was held in a traditional Vietnamese house. It was clean and comfortable" (ref. 27)
			"While the winding walk through back alleys inspired a little trepidation, the house where the class was lovely and clean." (ref. 85)
Togetherness	162	6,52%	"As an added bonus, our group were fantastic people and we ended up making friends & going out for beers and karaoke til very late!" (ref. 45-Australia)
			"I've gone to cooking classes where you only watch a chef cook, but here we got stuck in, cutting and mixing and tasting as we went." (ref. 131)
Value and Price	31	1,24%	"Great value for money."(ref. 420-UK)

Appendix 2. List of code frame generated from prior research

Authors	Articles	Emotional Dimensions	Togetherness And Co-Creation	Authenticity	Hospitality	Instructor's Attributes	Quality Of Foods/Culinary Characteristics	Space/Setting	Knowledge Dimension (History/Culture)	Quantity Of Foods	Value/Price	Satisfaction, Recommendation, And Revisit Intentions	Personalizations	Novelty	
Williams et al. (2019)	Attributes of memorable gastro-tourist's experiences	"Exciting, home, comfortable, familiar, love, warm, amazing, incredible"	"Friendly, helpful, knowledgeable support staff"	"Including some educational element regarding a different culture, a kitchen technique, or information about a particular food or drink" "Gastro-hosts were described as genuine, authentic, sincere, real, sharing, caring"											
Kodas & Aksoy (2022)	Understanding of Tourist's Memorable Local Food Experiences: A metnography study	"excellent", "irresistible", "unbelievable"	"family dinner", "join people at a table", "sit next to strangers", "a fine opportunity to mingle with locals", "a place to meet new people"		"waiters are kind people", "helpful staff", "service was good", "hospitality was amazing", "great, friendly service"			"very elegant ambiance", "authentic experience", "tastefully decorated restaurant", "perfect atmosphere", "authentic architecture", "the setting makes the visit worth it"							
Amaro & Duque (2022)	What makes a memorable food tour experience? Insights from the Rome Food Tour Sunset	"fun"	"socialization"		"guide is "amazing", "fantastic", "lovely", "friendly", "great", "fun/funny", "engaging", "passionate", "entertaining", "excellent", "outstanding", "brilliant", "delightful", "incredible", "phenomenal", "wonderful" "				"learning history", "learning local culture and traditional Italian cuisine"	"plentiful"					
Atsiz et al (2021)	Understanding food experience in sharing-economy platforms: Insights from Eatwith and Withlocals		"It is always good to connect with the locals when travelling, and this is a great way to do it"	"it was an authentic local experience, as we were surrounded by local people, everyone was speaking Turkish, and the menu was in Turkish too..." "top-notch food", "a food with a story behind it", "real Turkish cuisine", "a variety of traditional foods", "authentic foods", "mom's recipe", "home-made", "so many fantastic flavors", "original"	"hospitable", "insightful", "patient", "friendly", "language skilled", "knowledgeable", "food passionate", "helpful", "intelligent", "a conversationalist", "easygoing"				"the place she took us too we would never have found on our own, and we both came away more knowledgeable about Turkish food and culture" "we got to experience all the quintessential Turkish food, located in hidden gems we would have never found on our own"						
Sthapit et al. (2020)	Tourist's motivations, emotions, and memorable local food experiences		"experiencing the food with friends made it memorable", "enjoying local food in the company of friends gave me immense pleasure and was a memorable experience", "sitting with family members while enjoying the local food was memorable and made me happy"	"the authenticity of the foods, and the hospitality and service received, made it memorable. The foods helped to explain a lot about the place and its history"			"each item tasted was delectable", "the taste", "taste of food", "fabulous taste", "different taste", "taste of course", "divine taste", "rich taste", "new taste"								
Shoukat et al. (2023)	Consequences of local culinary memorable experience: Evidence from Tiktok influencers		"I felt confident/comfortable interacting with the local place's staff during my local food experience" "My local food experience was enhanced because I participated in the experience"												

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Yigit (2022)	Is it possible to get to know a culture through cooking classes? Tourists experiences of cooking classes in Istanbul		"... it felt like I was hanging out with good friends..." "... truly a special experience as it felt like a dinner party with friends..." "it was a beautiful way to connect with our amazing Turkish hosts and fellow travelers..." "... thanks so much for everything, even though we just got to know them - when we left we felt like leaving good friends!"	"...this was a most enjoyable day and a fantastic way to have an authentic experience within Istanbul, to meet other travellers from all around the world and support and profit from, genuine local entrepreneurship and creativity..." "...we walked the markets, learnt about traditional and authentic Turkish food from the historical regions, prepared and ate some amazing food and made some friends along the way..." "...is an amazing host, the recipes are great and the market walk and cooking class give you a unique insight into the history, authentic culture and culinary delights of Turkey..."	"we really enjoyed being able to go to the local market there and speak with the store vendors. They clearly enjoyed interacting with us" "you really get a sense of community and are welcomed by many of the market holders, who genuinely want to show you what they do" "we interacted with local shopkeepers and learned about their products. At every shop we visited, we were welcomed with sweets, they are extremely generous"	"...a private class for three ... warm, welcoming, relaxed demeanor is infectious and her teaching approach was brilliant..."	"...I enjoyed new tastes and texture, I loved everything but especially the artichokes cooked with vegetables and orange juice and the caramelized pumpkin dessert with walnuts and tahini..." "...Turkish cuisine is very versatile and delicious..." "... instead we delved into recipes that are equally divine but less familiar, including Anatolian stuffed aubergine, Circassian chicken, and a sweet pumpkin dessert... the dishes were simple, beautiful, and packed with delicious flavour..."		"... one of the easiest ways to explore local culture and history is through food..." "amazing class! After a short walk around the neighborhood and a brief history of Turkey and its people, we learned how to make traditional Turkish dishes, in a clean and fun environment. We enjoyed stories about the traditions, every day life and whatnot..." "when I travel, I try to do a cooking class in each country to understand a bit more about the culture from a culinary perspective..."		"...cooking lesson of local cuisine and a dining experience well worth every cent..." "...it was a great class and worth every penny and second..." "...price is reasonable and definitely you get value for money..."	" the whole experience was really amazing and we love the cooking house also! I told ...if I came back again, I will definitely join another course. Just book the course and you will thank yourself for making such a great decision" "the cooking class has been described here before and I can only say: Go, learn to cook Turkish food and take a tour with..." "would strongly recommend to try this one lifetime experience!"		
Stone et al. (2017)	Elements of Memorable Food, Drink, and Culinary Tourism Experiences	surprise	" having a five-course meal prepared in front of us by our own chef, for my husband and me, while staying at the Taj Palace Hotel in Mumbai" "travelling around Vietnam with my mother and grandparents and them introducing me to their favourite foods"				Local foods authentic foods novel foods unusual or bizarre foods wine and beer	"there was a restaurant in Ireland on the inside it looked like you were inside a giant tree" "went to Seattle Space Needle for dinner. The view was breathtaking...which revolves for you to enable to see all the view of Seattle"		" when I took my cruise there was an assortment of freefood that I experimented and tasted which I probably would not have done if I had to pay for it."		"I ate spare ribs...in a very small restaurant in Austria...in 2010. I went back there in 2015, drove form 2 hours from Vienna just to eat it again"		
Jokom et al. (2023)	Culinary and destination experiences on behavioral intentions: an insight into local Indonesian food		Interaction with local people A different way of eating A different way of service offered Social interaction	Authentic Taste and Spices Unique cooking method Unique food presentation	Local people's hospitality Communication skills of the local staff			Cleanliness Ambiance			Value for money	Intention to recommend a visit Intention to recommend trying the local cuisine Revisit intention Consume local cuisine again		
Agveiwaah et al. (2019)	Understanding culinary tourist motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty using a structural approach		"I am satisfied with sharing an experience with friends/family"						"I felt a different character since I was able to immerse myself more meaningfully in Thai culture through this cooking class"			"after taking this cooking class, I am likely to recommend Thai restaurants in my country more often" I would like to join more cooking classes in Thailand again.		
Luoh et al. (2020)	Cooking for fun: The sources of fun in cooking learning tourism		Interacting with relatives and friends Interacting with cooking class students from different countries Being praised by teachers or other cooking class students Interacting with vendors at the food market	Understanding local food ingredients at the local market Cooking using traditional cooking appliances	Recruiting a teacher with an interesting and humorous teaching style Producing course content that is lively and interesting		Tasting foreign dishes you have cooked		Experiencing the cultural atmosphere at the local food market Learning local cooking methods or habits Learning new cooking skills					

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Carvalho et al. (2023)	Co-creation of food tourism experiences: Tourist's perspectives of a Lisbon food tour	"it was fascinating, unfolding pleasure to discover this residential neighbourhood and its bakeries, tapas bars, brand new winery outlet and literary museum restaurants (...and that delicious soupy rice!)"	" the tour guide has the ability to transfer a tour with a group of people of differemnt nationalities into a tour of friends who meet to discover a traditional neighbourhood in terms of its history, culture and gastronomy."	"The guide led us through the meandering streets of Lisboa, fusing local street food, artistic boutique gourmet joints, historical wonders, creative shops and Lisbon hidden neighbourhous			"all food was extremely fresh", "delicious tastes of Portuguese food	" the magnificent panoramic view of the city", "some fantastic view"	" the tour guide was a superb historian and food guide as we spent the afternoon and evening wandering about. The food was outstanding, bu ther knowledge and insights on Portuguese culture and history added the necessary spice to complete the experience"				"I am a vegetarian, and immediately after I booked the tour I got a mail from Pedro. He asked me what I do eat and what I do not, so they could make a menu for me"	
Sthapit et al. (2021)	Motivational, emotional and memorable dimensions of non-Muslim tourist's halal food experiences	"joy", "love", "no strong emotions", "anger", "excitement", "content", "interest", "gratitude", "pride", "serenity"	"enjoying halal food with friends", "eating with friends was an unforgettable memory", "the eating experience with friends", "eating and spending time with family", "eating with my family", "joyful experience with friends", "enjoyed it with my friends", "sharing food with my family", "good times with family"				"unique taste", "rich taste", "spicy", "tasty", "yummy taste", "taste of course", "divine taste", "rich taste", "taste of food was awesome", "loved the taste", "unfamiliar taste", "taste of the food", "new taste", "flavour", "flavour of the food"							"feeling of having something new", "new food", "dishes were all new to me", "something new that we are used to", "newness of the food", "new for my mouth pallet", "new dish that none of us had ever tried", "completely new"

Appendix 3. Example of reference and label

Ref	User Name	Type Of Group	Location	Rating	Review's Heading	Review	Date
1	David Perez	family		5	Well Worth The Time	Well worth the time to take this cooking class. It was a great way to see a new part of the city, and the meal was fresh and tasty.	16/04/2022
2	micadogl	family	America	5	Wonderful cooking class!	We had a wonderful market tour and cooking class with Jack! We were with another family, and everything was so fun. We loved visiting the market and seeing so many fresh and unusual things. We loved the cooking class, and the food was absolutely delicious. Jack is an amazing guide and a real professional. We highly recommend this class to everyone who wants to learn about the food and culture of Hanoi!	16/04/2022
3	Johnatan M	couples	France	5	A wonderful evening	Great experience with Kevin, nice cooking class, everything was perfectly organised and we spent a great moment.	29/04/2022
4	Magnus		America	5	Good evening	Mike and his assistant Fred was wonderful. Good host. I did the Vegan course and might become vegan myself after this. Huge recommendation to everyone	06/05/2022