

Gastronomy tourism: Opportunities and challenges for Vietnam, especially Da Nang city

Du lịch ẩm thực: Cơ hội và thách thức nhìn từ Việt Nam, đặc biệt tại thành phố Đà Nẵng

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Abstract

Food plays an important role in the tourism industry. Food-related activities not only attract tourists but also help bring many development opportunities to the local community. Therefore, among many types of tourism, gastronomic tourism has become a type that takes special consideration for development in numerous destinations. However, successfully developing this type of tourism to become a true gastronomic destination has many challenges. Based on the analysis of secondary data sources, this article discusses some issues related to gastronomy tourism, synthesizes experiences and initiatives from successful destinations, and analyzes opportunities and challenges related to gastronomy tourism development in Vietnam, especially in Danang city, contributing to proposing ideas for this type of tourism.

Keywords: gastronomy; gastronomy tourism; food tourism; Danang, Vietnam.

Tóm tắt

Ẩm thực đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong ngành du lịch. Các hoạt động liên quan đến ẩm thực không chỉ thu hút khách du lịch mà còn giúp mang lại nhiều cơ hội phát triển cho cộng đồng địa phương. Vì vậy, trong nhiều loại hình du lịch, du lịch ẩm thực đã trở thành một loại hình được nhiều điểm đến đặc biệt quan tâm phát triển. Tuy nhiên, để phát triển thành công loại hình du lịch này, đưa điểm đến trở thành một điểm đến du lịch ẩm thực cũng có nhiều thách thức. Dựa trên việc phân tích các nguồn dữ liệu thứ cấp, bài viết này bàn luận một số vấn đề liên quan đến du lịch ẩm thực, tổng hợp kinh nghiệm và sáng kiến từ các điểm đến thành công, đồng thời phân tích các cơ hội và thách thức liên quan đến phát triển du lịch ẩm thực tại Việt Nam, đặc biệt là thành phố Đà Nẵng, góp phần đề xuất các ý tưởng phát triển loại hình du lịch này.

Từ khóa: ẩm thực; du lịch ẩm thực; ăn uống; Đà Nẵng; Việt Nam.

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1. Introduction

Food is not only a basic need for humans to survive, but also becomes a motivation for tourism [6]. Making up 30% or more of the tourist expenditure, food plays an important role in the development of tourism services [20]. Since gastronomy is a vital part of the journey, it plays a crucial role in the tourist experience, which is not only a nourishment but also contributes to fostering the experience of tourism [6]. Gastronomy tourism offers a huge opportunity to promote and strengthen tourism destinations, especially for tourists who have great awareness of the cuisine of their chosen destination. Gastronomy has become a crucial element in the competitiveness of tourist destinations [10]. Thus, gastronomy tourism has gained increasing prominence over the last decade in the tourism industry [4].

In the context of gastronomy tourism development, Vietnam is also one of the favorite destinations for tourists who want to enjoy food, appearing on Asia's Leading Culinary Destination 2023 nomination list [25]. In 2023, for the first time, 103 restaurants in Hanoi and HCM City of Vietnam were honored by Michelin Guide; four of which were awarded one prestigious Michelin Star, 29 establishments were awarded Bib Gourmand (Inspectors' Favorites for Quality Cooking at Moderate Prices), and 70 other eateries known as Michelin-Selected restaurants [21]. This event proves Vietnam's appeal and ability to become a leading gastronomic destination. Gastronomy tourism is a new direction chosen by businesses and by localities in Vietnam. Although most localities have exploited their culinary strengths to develop tourism products, their culinary potential has not yet been fully exploited. According to the orientation of Vietnam's tourism development, Danang city's government has issued a decision to develop

gastronomy into a unique tourism product in the period 2023-2025, with a vision to 2030 [7], which aims to thrive gastronomic tourism in Danang City. Nevertheless, Danang city has been lack of the signature gastronomic products to attract tourists. Food is still considered as a component of tourism products instead of being taken as advantaged as an individual tourism product. To realize the direction of growing gastronomic tourism, it is necessary for the city to understand its available culinary capabilities and learn about successful gastronomic tourism products at similar destinations at home and abroad. Simultaneously, identifying advantages and drawbacks encountered helps the city propose proper ideas to develop this type of tourism. Based on this goal, by using the research methodologies such as synthesizing, analysing, comparing, collecting secondary data and documents from articles and the internet, this article synthesizes experiences and initiatives in successful gastronomic destinations around the world, analyze opportunities and challenges related to gastronomic tourism background in Vietnam and Danang city, and then, suggest some recommendations for this type of tourism product.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gastronomy and gastronomy tourism

The word "Gastronomy" is originated from the Greek words "gastros" and "gnomos" which means "stomach" and "knowledge or law" in English [20]. The Cambridge Dictionary defines Gastronomy as "the art and knowledge involved in preparing and eating good food." However, Gastronomy is not only about food but also about beverages [10]. Although "gastronomy" is defined as the art of eating and drinking in many sources, it is an interrelated branch of art and science that is directly related to chemistry, literature, biology, geology, history, music,

philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, nutrition, and agriculture [20]. The UNWTO states that “Gastronomy is about much more than food. It reflects the culture, heritage, traditions, and sense of community of the different people. This is a way of promoting understanding among different cultures and bringing people and traditions closer together”.

Although “Food tourism,” “Culinary tourism,” “Gastronomy tourism” are the terms often used interchangeably, according to the World Foodtravel Association, with the definition of Food Tourism is “the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place” [26], there is a bit difference among them depending on tourist’s motivations. According to Hall and Sharplers (2003), Food Tourism is categorized into four types: gourmet tourism, gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, and rural tourism, with the major motivation for tourists participating in each type of tourism [15]. Tourists participating in gourmet and gastronomic tourism have a high interest in food. While having a gastronomic experience with eating and drinking during a holiday is the main motivation for tourists to join gourmet tourism, there are different activities related to food besides eating in gastronomic tourism. In gastronomic tourism, both touristic activities are carried out, and the culinary products of the destination are experienced [15]. In addition, gastronomic tourism involves reaching a good meal, while culinary tourism involves the cooking, presentation, and tasting processes of the food [15].

The Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC) of the UNWTO defines Gastronomy Tourism as a type of tourism activity characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. In addition to authenticity, tradition, and innovative culinary

experiences, gastronomy tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting local producers, participating in food festivals, and attending cooking classes. In addition, wine tourism, a type of tourism in which tourists visit vineyards, wineries, taste, consume, or purchase wine at/near the source, is seen as a sub-type of gastronomy tourism, according to the UNWTO.

Developing sustainable gastronomy tourism is a contemporary concern. Sustainable gastronomic tourism is indicated as “the orientation to agricultural foods, local and traditional gastronomic elements, and rural areas with gastronomic tourism, not an attraction created within gastronomic tourism” [15]. The 8th World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism organized by the UNWTO in 2023 highlighted gastronomy tourism’s role in the preservation of local territories and promotion of sustainable practices.

2.2. Benefits and challenges of gastronomic tourism development

Food and tourism play a significant role in contemporary economies. Linking food and tourism provides a foundation for local economic and cultural development [1]. Food tourism should be regarded as a significant factor in the development of a region [6]. Food experience supports brand and market destinations and fosters local traditions and crafts appealing to tourists [1]. In addition, gastronomic experiences play a crucial role in tourists’ holiday experiences. A positive gastronomic experience impacts tourists’ holiday satisfaction. Destinations that provide visitors with satisfying gastronomic experiences can provide an advantage over their competitors [15]. Tovmasyan (2019) expressed that gastronomic tourism is a driving force for thriving the economy, producing new jobs, increasing the income of the population working in the area, and so on. In addition, it is believed

to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals [20]. According to Mr. Taleb Rifai, the former UNWTO Secretary-General, gastronomy tourism not only supports destination branding but also assists in promoting sustainable tourism by preserving valuable cultural heritage, empowering and nurturing pride among communities, and strengthening intercultural understanding [23]. Enabling differentiation and unique positioning of territories, providing the region with high revenue, and generating a desire to return or loyalty among the visitors are additional benefits that gastronomy tourism creates [24].

Gastronomy tourism brings many benefits to regional development, especially to the economy. However, there are also challenges in developing this type of tourism, as well as in the region. The development of gastronomy tourism requires the participation of both authorities and stakeholders. In addition to public officials, cooperation between food producers and chefs and cooperation with local enterprises are the first two important aspects in the value chain, according to the case of Japan [24]. Authenticity issues in culinary culture to offer a sustainable local food experience, the lack of policy to support tourism development, awareness of local culinary culture, challenges of food quality, hygiene, pricing, and limitations in marketing activities are other common challenges, such as in Bangladesh [12]. Environmental issues caused by tourists and the lack of natural resources, such as food, water, electricity, or the possibility of loss of cultural identity due to adapting to the needs of tourists are other challenges.

2.3. Experiences and initiatives in successful gastronomic destinations around the world

Gastronomy tourism is a type of tourism in which many destinations worldwide are developing. Italy, France, and Thailand have

become popular with their cuisines and have attracted many tourists [6]. Within the limits of this article, the author presents gastronomy tourism experiences and initiatives that can be applied to Vietnam from successful tourist destinations.

Thailand: Thailand is recognized for its easy access to restaurants, reasonable prices, hospitable staff, and English menu options [6]. The first official promotion initiative for Thai gastronomy called “Thai Kitchen of the World” was commenced to promote Thai food as a leading world cuisine. In 2016, “Amazing Thai taste” campaign developed helped Thailand to be named the world’s best destination for street food by CNN then. In the period of 2017-2021, the Thai government promoted regional food and Thai cuisine as components of cultural identity and further reinforced the preservation of local authenticity as a tourism product through community-based tourism, food festivals, and culinary trails. Thai government has seen Thai cuisine as a “storyteller of Thai culture”. Thailand has practiced gastrodiplomacy efficiently through successful tourism marketing strategies since the 2000s with the campaign “Thai Kitchen to the World”, the “Global Thai Campaign”, the “Thai Chefs Work Visa” Thai Chefs Work Visa for chefs to work overseas. These campaigns help Thailand to reinforce the competitiveness of Thai gastronomy globally, spread the impact of Thai culture, and increase agricultural exports. They also strengthen Thailand's image as a gastronomic destination [16].

Japan: Food is considered one of the main reasons for international tourists visiting Japan as well as domestic tourists’ visits. “To eat Japanese meals” and “drinking Japanese sake” were the main aims motivating tourists to visit Japan. Gastronomy tourism in Japan promotes a relatively high level of public-private

collaboration, in which most municipalities collaborate with local enterprises. Gastronomy tourism initiatives in Japan aim to achieve the goal of sustainable regional development, including destination development and culinary culture preservation. Some prominent cases of gastronomy tourism initiatives are the success of Japanese sake breweries in Takayama City, Saijo Sake Festivals in Higashi-Hiroshima city, Shiribeshi Food Festival to highlight local culinary richness, Gastronomy town in Isumi City, a non-profit organization Hagi-Genkinokai, and Hagi Seamart seaside market to promote gastronomic tourism in Hagi city [24].

Italy: Italy is known for its cuisine in taste, presentation, the variety and the quality of food [6]. Greater resilience, sustainability and inclusivity are the directions to promote gastronomy tourism in Italy currently and in the upcoming. Gastronomic tourism initiatives develop towards bringing diverse gastronomic experiences to tourists through a combination of culinary, cultural, historical, and natural environmental elements. Some of them are experiencing Tour of the Chianina breed in Valdichiana senese-Tuscany, combining farm visits and enjoying food made from IGP Chianina meat; “You & I on the flavor train: Tour Franciacorta & lake Iseo tour with lunch and tasting” combining nature, culture, food and wine with a slow approach on the train in Province of Brescia, Lombardy; “Bike food stories” with 13 different wine and food tours by bicycle to discover Parma and the surrounding areas; “Free bee” Farm offering the chance to adopt a tree bee and become a temporary beekeeper; or the “Fields of Borla” farm and agritourism in Vernasca, Emilia-Romagna, etc [4].

The USA: Food festivals are a great choice for American tourists for both the need of eating and traveling. Food festivals originated from local farmers’ markets and small-town fairs, gradually

becoming a phenomenon that attracts millions of visitors and contributes billions of dollars to the local economy. Every year there are nearly 1500 food festivals across the US. Food festivals have diverse themes that showcase regional characteristics such as agricultural products, culture and lifestyle, as well as enhance the competitive advantage of the destination, such as South Beach Wine & Food Festival in Miami. The format and price point of festivals also vary depending on the host destinations, for example, Taste of Chicago festivals with free entry and low price, but the New York City Wine & Food festivals with a high range of prices. Food festivals also contribute to reducing the seasonality of destinations, such as the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen festival in Aspen, Colorado which is a ski destination to attract visitors in the summer [23].

3. Current tourism situation and gastronomic tourism scenarios in Vietnam

3.1. Vietnam’s current tourism situation and perspective

Overcoming the crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam officially opened to welcome international visitors under new normal conditions from March 15, 2022, marking the recovery of the tourism industry. Total revenue from tourists in 2022 is estimated to reach 495,000 billion VND, an increase of 2.75 times over the same period. Domestic tourists reached 101.3 million, exceeding the target of 60 million set at the beginning of the year. The number of international searches for Vietnam tourism grew by about 50% -70%, reaching the 4th highest increase in the world, according to statistics from Google's market trend tracking tool. In 2023, Vietnam tourism continues to prosper with impressive numbers achieved in the first 10 months of 2023, exceeding the set target plan, specifically, the number of international visitors to Vietnam

reached more than 9.97 million, exceeding the set target. According to the 2023 plan, domestic visitors will reach 98.7 million visitors with total revenue from tourists reaching 582.6 trillion VND. Tourism is considered a bright spot in Vietnam's economic recovery. Not only that, Vietnam continues to affirm its brand and position on the world tourism map by receiving 54 awards at the 2023 Asia-Pacific Regional Awards Ceremony of the World Travel Awards [17]. According to the ranking of the World Travel Awards organization, Vietnam has won Asia's Leading Destination award for three consecutive years 2021-2022-2023, won Asia' Leading Culinary Destination award for two consecutive years 2019-2020, and continuously appeared in the World's Leading Culinary Destination award nomination list from 2019 - 2023 [25]. This proves Vietnam's potentials to become a leading culinary destination in the world. According to the Prime Minister's direction, Vietnam tourism will become a spearhead economy, developing in the direction of green growth, making Vietnam a leading destination in the world. Development motto: *“Unique products - Professional services - Convenient and simple procedures - Competitive prices - Clean and beautiful hygienic environment - Safe, civilized and friendly destination”* is the orientation of Vietnam tourism's development in the coming time [17].

3.2. Gastronomic tourism backgrounds in Vietnam

Vietnamese cuisine is distinctive thanks to the unique blend of ingredients, the balance of “Five basic elements of Eastern philosophy” in the cooking style. Despite influences from Chinese or French cuisine, Vietnamese cuisine still has a unique distinction, which is a priority

on flavor, creating unforgettable impressions with visitors [22]. The diversity in regional culture also creates unique gastronomic characteristics from North to South of Vietnam, with many dishes recognized around the world, setting Asian records such as Pho Hanoi, Banh Mi, Hai Phong crab meat, Nghe An eel porridge, Saigon broken rice, Hue beef vermicelli, Gia Lai dry pho, Quang noodles, My Tho noodles, dishes from ocean tuna in Phu Yen, other lotus dishes in Dong Thap, coconut dishes in Ben Tre, etc. Four restaurants honored with 1 prestigious Michelin Guide star in 2023 proves the development of gastronomy in Vietnam. With a long and diverse culinary culture, Vietnam has an abundance of potentials to become the world's Gastronomic destination [13]. Nominated as the World's Leading Culinary Destination for 5 consecutive years (2019-2023) is proof of international tourists' love for Vietnamese cuisine. Travel + Leisure magazine has urged its American readers to explore Vietnam in 2023 as a country called Asia's “best culinary destination.”

Vietnam's tourism development strategy until 2030 also identifies gastronomy tourism as a crucial product type, helping to enhance the competitive position and brand of Vietnam's tourism. Therefore, gastronomy tourism has been oriented to become one of the main tourism products that localities focus on developing. Street food tour, enjoying specialty dishes at local restaurants, cooking classes organized by travel agencies/tourism partners, food festivals/culinary weeks, etc. are the major current products in some prominent tourist destinations. *(Within the limits of the article, the author only selected a few touristic destinations in Vietnam to introduce.)*

Table 1. Significant gastronomy tourism products being developed by some tourist localities in Vietnam

Tourist destinations	Existing Gastronomic products	Significant Specialties
Ha Noi	Food streets: Ta Hien beer street, Ngu Xa pho roll street, Hoan Kiem lake salad street, Phung Hung hotpot street; night food street: Tong Duy Tan and Dao Ngoc - Ngu Xa; Old Quarter Food Tours; Annual Hanoi Street Food Festival; Annual Hanoi Food and Craft Village Tourism Festival; 1 star Michelin restaurants	Pho Hanoi, Bun Cha Hanoi (Pork pie noodle), Giang Egg coffee, La Vong Fish cake, Banh Mi, West Lake Shrimp cake, Hanoi Crab noodle soup, Hanoi fried rice worms
Quang Ninh	Quang Ninh Food Festival; Van Don Food festival; Tien Yen Chicken King Competition; Duong Hoa Tea Culture Festival; Restaurant ship model on Ha Long Bay (Sea Octopus, Ambassador and Paradise Delight)	Dong Trieu worm, Quang Yen crab, Ha Long squid patties, Co To squid, Van Don sea worms to Tien Yen chicken, Binh Lieu stir-fried pho
Hue	Royal cuisine and Hue folk cuisine; Street food Tours; Cooking Classes	Hue beef noodle soup, sweer soup wrapped in roasted pork, mussel rice, loc cake, fig mixed with vegetarian flowers, vegetarian lotus leaf steamed rice
Da Nang	Food streets: Huynh Thuc Khang, Pham Hong Thai, Le Thanh Nghi, etc.; Street food Tours; Cooking Classes; International Cuisine Festival; Enjoy Danang Cuisine and Beer space Festival	Nam O fish salad, Quang noodle, Rice paper rolled with pork skin on both ends, fish ball noodle soup, vermicelli noodle with heavy fish sauce, savory pancakes with grilled pork roll
Hoi An - Quang Nam	Street food Tours; Cooking Classes; Zero-waste restaurant chain; Hoi An International Cuisine Festival	Cao lau, Hoi An Chicken rice, Quang noodle, Banh mi, Stir-fried mussel cake, Corn sweet soup
Ho Chi Minh City	Street food Tours; Cooking Classes/ Cooking Demonstration; Food Festivals; Asean Culinary Week	Sai Gon Steamed broken rice, mixed rice paper, My Tho rice noodle, a variety of Vietnam regional dishes

The current status of gastronomy tourism development in Vietnam still has many challenges and resources have not been well exploited. In general, gastronomic products are being developed in localities primarily to meet the dining needs of guests during the trip, in which gastronomy is the factor that enhances the guest experience instead of being the main core element [19]. Food tours in localities and cooking classes are developed individually and are mainly exploited by travel companies, focusing on the international tourism market. Experiencing street food, restaurant systems, food fairs, and food festivals are other aspects

that are promoted [2]. Some localities have developed products that combine dining with cultural experiences, but not many. Products bearing regional cultural imprints are still not prominent and need to be further explored. This issue has also been mentioned by many authors in studies about the development of Hue gastronomy tourism [5], Gia Lai cuisine [18], etc. Sustainable gastronomy tourism associated with local communities is also an aspect that needs to be considered for development [18]. In the article *Some solutions to develop Vietnam's gastronomy tourism to reach out to the world*, author Pham Thu Huyen mentioned some other

challenges with gastronomy tourism in almost localities in Vietnam such as inconvenient facilities & infrastructure; Food hygiene and safety are lack of guarantees; labor issues in terms of expertise, attitude and style; the art of culinary processing lacks uniqueness; Advertising and promotion activities still have many shortcomings [9]. In this context, the Vietnam Cuisine Association and local Culinary Associations are established with the aim to maintain and exploit culinary culture for gastronomy tourism. Developing the project “*Building and developing Vietnamese culinary culture into a national brand*”, which conducts surveys and collects data on Vietnamese culinary culture to build a “Column of 1,000 typical Vietnamese culinary dishes” and converts that database into an “Online Map of Vietnamese Cuisine” and “Online Museum of Vietnamese Cuisine”, show a Vietnam's clear awareness of the gastronomic strengths and challenges, which becomes a direction for localities to develop. According to this project, in phase 2023, they support localities to form a set of events and activities to encourage the progress of the culinary cultural ecosystem, communication and promotion at the domestic and international levels, and to appreciate the values of gastronomy on culture, nutrition, and economy towards the goal of reinforcing the local gastronomy tourism.

4. Potentials and challenges in thriving gastronomic tourism in Danang city

4.1. Danang's current tourism situation and perspective

After the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, along with the recovery of Vietnam tourism, Danang tourism has also recorded positive signs of recovery. According to statistics from the Da Nang Department of Tourism, in the first 9 months of 2023, the number of visitors staying in Danang is estimated to reach 5.8 million, 2.1

times higher than the same period in 2022, equal to 109% compared to 2019. Of which, domestic visitors account for the main proportion with 4.2 million, an increase of 1.7 times compared to 2022 and equal to 143% compared to 2019. The number of international visitors is estimated to reach 1.6 million, an increase of 5.8 times compared to 2022 and equal to 67% compared to 2019. Despite the increase, it can be seen that the international tourist market has not yet recovered well compared to before the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic. The current main international tourist markets in Da Nang are Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, America, India, Malaysia, Japan, China and Singapore. Tourist trends have also changed when the proportion of individual tourists accounts for as high as 80% of the total number of guests staying and tourists traveling in groups operated by travel companies account for only 15% - 20% [3]. The group of 3 main tourism products attracting tourists to Danang is still festival & event tourism, followed by sightseeing, entertainment, theme parks tourism, and beach tourism. It is not surprising that Danang is a nominee for the Asia's Leading Festival & Event Destination 2023 award, and Sun World Ba Na Hills won the Asia's Leading Theme Park 2023 and Vietnam's Leading Theme Park 2023 awards by the World Travel Organization Award [25]. Although the international tourist market has not recovered as expected, Danang is still a highly appreciated tourist destination. Danang is the only representative of Vietnam in the list of 11 best places in Asia that tourists should visit if they intend to travel in 2024, according to the American travel magazine Condé Nast Traveler. Those are positive signs for the recovery and growth of Danang tourism industry. However, in current competitive background, it is essential for Danang to research and initiate creative tourism products to appeal more tourists.

4.2. Potentials & opportunities for gastronomy tourism

Danang is famous for its natural resources with sea and sand to develop tourism. Be favored by nature, Danang has a variety of beautiful landscapes which includes prominent sandy beaches, Ba Na Hill, Marble Mountain, Son Tra Peninsula, and the rivers cross the city. In addition, Danang has an advantaged location that is a linking spot between Hue and Hoi An, two prominent tourist destinations in Central Vietnam. These not only help Danang become well-known as leisure destination but also offer culinary potentials to exploit. Danang cuisine is not only rich in culinary culture of the Central region but also endowed with natural products from the sea. Quang noodle, rice paper rolled with pork skin on both ends, especially seafood are favorite dishes of domestic and foreign tourists. Danang is the place converging the culinary culture of the North, Central and South regions. Therefore, diversified street food is also an interesting point of Danang with its richness and affordable prices [7]. With the desire of providing quality experience related to food service, Danang has attentively developed the foodservice facilities over the time. Currently, Danang has a large number of F&B service facilities with over 4000 outlets including 200 restaurants, not including restaurants within hotels and resorts (according to Danang Tourism Department). The development of foodservice business has been bringing many contributions and revenue to the local community. The traditional food market system like Con market, Han market is a fascinating feature of gastronomic experience with tourists and locals, where budgeted visitors can enjoy cuisine at reasonable prices. Besides, Danang also has unique traditional culinary craft villages associated with specialties like Nam O fish sauce village, Tuy Loan rice paper village, Cam Le dry sesame cake making village. These promise

providing unique experience for tourists who want to explore not only culinary features but the lifestyle of locals as well.

Danang has been implementing various practices to exploit these things to appeal more tourists domestically and abroad. The formation of special street food and hosting some annual food festivals have contributed to help many tourists identify Danang gastronomy better. The establishment of the Danang Culinary Culture Association to research and preserve culinary culture also supports the sustainable gastronomy tourism in Danang. The Danang city government has issued a decision to develop gastronomy into a unique tourism product for the period 2023-2025, with orientation to 2030 [7], in order to make a difference for the destination, in which food is main motivation instead of just being a component of the trip as before. With the strength of its destination brand recognized by domestic and foreign tourists, Danang can take advantage to build a gastronomic destination brand. Nevertheless, like general situation in Vietnam, Danang must conquer some challenges to become a successful gastronomic destination.

4.3. Challenges for gastronomy tourism

Although the city has an orientation to develop gastronomy tourism, in the list of 9 main types of tourism of Danang in 2023 including festival/event tourism; sightseeing & entertainment; beach & beach resort; night travel; waterways; ecology-community-agriculture; MICE; golf; wedding [3], gastronomy tourism is still absent. Gastronomy is still an integrated element in other tourism products, not yet recognized as a separate specific type. This may be due to some challenges existing in Danang city like: (i) *Lack of featured products in gastronomy tourism and signature dishes that define the brand.* Compared to Ha Noi, Hue and Hoi An, Danang is somewhat limited in important gastronomic

highlights. If Hoi An is characterized by Cao Lau and Hue is the royal cuisine of the ancient capital, Danang still finds it difficult to determine its own signature food. Tourists coming to Danang often eat Quang noodles, pork rolls, banh xeo, etc., but these dishes are typically Quang dishes and easy to find in other locations. Quang noodle as a typical dish of Da Nang is closely associated with Quang Nam. Various types of rice cakes, like beo, nam, loc, etc., often introduced in International Food Festivals are involved with Hue cuisine. *Danang also has typical culinary villages, however, they have not yet been utilized as gastronomic products.* (ii) *Lack of inspirational food stories to attract visitors to explore the destination.* Food stories can be expressed diversely through the meaning of the name, related to history - culture, ways of exploiting ingredients, processing, enjoying, or personal culinary imprints. Building food stories associated with each dish and product will help create a unique brand for local cuisine or ideas for building culinary events and naming dishes [11]. (iii) *Challenges in controlling food safety and hygiene, product quality, and price transparency.* Although Danang has focused on controlling food hygiene and safety issues for foodservice establishments and local markets, the large number of street food vendors is also a challenge to ensure food safety. Price transparency and clear price listing, providing services as promised are important factors in retaining customers. This is also well recognized by food service businesses, however, there are also cases where price requirements are not met, causing loss of sympathy from tourists. (iv) *Danang's own gastronomic product promotion activities are not yet diverse.* Danang carries out tourism promotion activities actively; however, gastronomic products have not been mentioned much, and only combined in other types like event and entertainment tourism. On the website

of Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, for instance, when searching for Things to do - Food, Danang is not the name that appears first; Danang also does not have a foodie map introducing typical dishes like Hoi An or Nha Trang which are alternatives to Danang for tourists. (v) *The quality of human resources for food processing and serving is limited.* Besides, there are not many restaurants named in the Michelin Guide list to attract customers in Danang. In the general context of Vietnam tourism, the lack of skilled human resources is an issue to tourism in Danang.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

Vietnam has a long-standing culinary culture and the art of preparing unique dishes of each region, with full potential to become a leading gastronomic destination in the world. However, to compete well with other culinary destinations in the region such as Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam needs more investment in gastronomy tourism, which is not only focusing on food, but also developing elements related to culinary culture and the gastronomic experience of tourists. Departments and localities need to coordinate with each other to develop policies supporting appropriate products of gastronomic tourism in a sustainable direction, benefiting local development without losing identity [17]. Building effective and sustainable tourism products requires effective connections between relevant parties: public agencies, associations, businesses and localities, according to the direction of General Director of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.

In the general orientation of Vietnam tourism, Danang considers promoting its strengths to create a stronger impression as a gastronomic destination in the Central region, compared to neighboring destinations with a strong culinary culture like Hue or Hoi An. There are some recommendations such as: (i) *Identifying typical*

dishes and positioning culinary product brands. Danang is located in the center of the chain of destinations in the Central region that tourists often choose, Hue - Danang - Quang Nam (according to Thua Thien Hue Travel Association), so there is the harmony of culinary cultures of the three regions and a variety of dishes for visitors to choose from in Danang. Danang should take advantage of this to position its image as *a cross-cultural gastronomic destination*. The city's orientation is to group gastronomic tourism products into 3 main groups as local cuisine, regional cuisine, and international cuisine. In each group, it is necessary to identify signature dishes to position the image and target customers according to motivation for appropriate promotion. For international and domestic visitors, local cuisine remains the main attraction. Beside Quang noodle (my Quang), special pork rolls (banh trang cuon thit heo), fish ball cake noodle soup (bun cha ca), seafood dishes are the main dishes to build the Danang culinary brand. With its strength in festivals, *the image of a destination for annual traditional/international food festivals* is also a suitable product for Danang. (ii) *Build a food story behind each dish, associated with the image of Danang.* Inspirational culinary stories will contribute to affirming Danang's brand in promoting culinary tourism. (iii) In addition to existing food tours, *exploit tours about Danang's own food specialty villages* such as Cam Le sesame dried cake making craft village, Tuy Loan rice paper making craft village or Nam O fish sauce craft village. This may give a chance for visitors to experience and explore local culinary culture, while creating benefits for the community. (iv) *Build a luxury gastronomic experience product for customers with high spending ability;* consider cruise ship restaurant models like Quang Ninh, or culinary art competitions for expertise visitors who want to learn about local

gastronomy. (v) *Strengthening the work to ensure food hygiene, product quality, price control and improving the quality of human resources processing and serving the gastronomic tourism products* are other aspects that need to be addressed.

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