

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i5.1804>

The Role of Gastronomy as a Cultural and Touristic Identity in Quito's Historic Center

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Abstract

The research approached the gastronomy of the historic center of Quito city as a cultural reference of the capital since the gastronomic field is one of the motivations of confluence to various places of both foreign and national tourists. The historic center of Quito city is one of the most visited destinations in Ecuador it is considered the best preserved in the region and its culinary heritage is also one of the main motivations for your visit. This study reveals the main characteristics and how gastronomic tourism has been developed in the center of the city and how it is immersed with various cultural, historical elements and factors, of ancestral knowledge and flavors, it will need a diversification in the tourist market and finally in the gastronomic offer, through a bibliographic review in various search platforms, a compilation of several authors is made to reach the conclusion that Quito, being a Metropolitan District, has a variety of products that enrich and enhance its gastronomy, positioning it as a cultural reference within the capital..

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Studies, Ecuadorian food, Gastronomy, Traditional food, Tourism, Zero Hunger.

Introduction

When we mention tourism, we get an idea of travel and quiet places. According to OMT (2022), tourism, which is an activity associated with rest, fun, sports, and access to culture and nature, must be conceived and practiced as a privileged means of individual and collective development. In other words, it is an activity that is conducted for a period to satisfy the needs of people.

Today, tourism has become a tool of great importance to achieve economic growth in intermediate development countries, likewise tourism in other parts of the world is seen in different ways because for some countries it is relevant to contribute to income economic sector, while for others it is an opportunity to encourage people to have a relationship with the environment to free themselves and get out of the usual environment, they also see it as a valuable opportunity to promote the natural resources they have. Even tourism allows to be strengthening the national identity (Yang et al.,2020).

According to Leal (2015) the first known cookbook was written at the end of the fourth century BC. and it is attributed to the Roman Marcus Gavius Apicius, a lover of good food, which is a compendium of recipes that demonstrated the importance of food and nutrition in the evolutionary development of the human being, it is also worth emphasizing what was mentioned by Csergo, & Lemasson (2008) that they attribute to the gastronomic process historically developed by institutions of French origin and date from the moment that Lyon was proclaimed

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Each country has a different gastronomy with a variety of aromas and flavors that characterize each region. According to Barrera (2006) it indicates that the gastronomy of a place has a cultural historical load of great importance not only because it is traditional to a region but also because of the relevance of social development that this entails, that is, the characteristics both the social and cultural aspects of a town or community are intimately related to the food that is consumed there.

There is then a cultural heritage not only in social organization, religious ideology, economy, or politics but also in gastronomy, which is an important feature of culture in each consolidated society. Therefore, food has a cultural load and, in this sense, tourism has been involved since it appreciates the value not only historical but also sentimental of said load and highlights it as a tourist attraction of a cultural nature (p. 6).

In Barrera & Bringas (2008) point out that tourists are currently breaking multiple cultural barriers and one of them is the gastronomic one, although it is true that the food service is part of the tourist plant, before it was usual that the food consumed within the touristic offer. They were common foods for tourists, now the offer also includes typical food of the place visited, which allows tourists to taste local food in a certain exotic way, this being one more experience of the trip, that is, a cultural exchange.

According to Barrera (2006) gastronomy is not only a boost for tourism, but also means a new ideal for peasant and Indigenous communities in the case of South America, where there is an empowerment of farmland. and a growth. in the racial pride of the communities since tourism has highlighted the important cultural contribution that their customs and traditions mean for the world, these traditions, put into food, reveal a complex panorama composed of rurality, rusticity, quality, purity, authenticity, concepts that in the imaginary of urban consumers are positively associated because it brings them closer to the past and they value lost heritage (p. 7).

In this context, local gastronomy becomes part of a tangible heritage and by associating food with tourism, a path of development is offered to the most vulnerable sectors of a country or region.

According to Guevara (2011) food is one of the physiological needs of the human being, essential for life, it is for this reason that food has become a set of culinary and cultural aspects generating vast variety gastronomic, there begins the importance of gastronomy within a society. Currently, one of the main tourist services is food, as such, small companies dedicated to this business have been created, a fundamental part for those who travel and do tourism (p.71).

According to OMT (2017) gastronomy is an essential component of history, tradition and identity that has also become an important reason to visit a destination, in addition the union between gastronomy and tourism offers a platform to revitalize cultures, conserving tangible and intangible heritage, empowering communities, and fostering intercultural understanding. Despite this, the potential of gastronomic tourism as intangible cultural heritage has not yet been exploited, and as the number of travelers in search of unique experiences in the world grows, the promotion of gastronomic tourism has been acquiring greater prominence in the development of tourism and its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. Gastronomy is the study of the relationship between culture and food, it is often mistakenly thought that the term gastronomy is only related to the art of cooking and the dishes around a table, however, this is a small part of said discipline. It cannot always be said that a cook is a gastronome since

gastronomy studies various cultural components taking food as its central axis. From the etymological point of view, the word gastronomy does not have a fully valid meaning since it derives from the Greek "gaster" or "gastros" which means stomach and "gnomes", knowledge, or law (Gutierrez, 2012).

Methodology

The research was based on a qualitative study, which according to Lopez (2002) defines it as a type of holistic research, since it covers the phenomenon as a whole and recursive, since the design of the research is emergent, it is being elaborated. as the investigation progresses. The qualitative approach employed in this study was grounded in bibliographic research, which involved a comprehensive review of previous studies related to the gastronomy of Quito and its interrelation with the cultural sphere.

According to Mora (2016), bibliographic research constitutes the initial stage of the investigative process. It systematically gathers existing knowledge through an extensive search for relevant information, theoretical insights, and methodological techniques related to the topic under analysis. It is important to highlight some aspects of this review.

A substantial body of research has explored how traditional cuisines in Latin American cities, such as Quito, function as dynamic expressions of cultural identity and intangible heritage. These studies highlight the interconnection between food, history, and social values, providing a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing gastronomy as a medium for cultural preservation and identity construction (Rojas-Rivas,2021)

Research in this domain emphasizes the integration of culinary traditions within heritage tourism frameworks. Scholars examine how food-related experiences are strategically embedded into tourism offerings to enhance cultural immersion and visitor appreciation. These practices not only support cultural sustainability but also serve as tools for place branding and local development (Manikandan, 2023)

Empirical studies have identified Quito's Historic Center as a significant gastronomic hub where traditional eateries and local markets offer emblematic Ecuadorian dishes. These spaces are analyzed for their role in strengthening cultural identity and attracting culinary tourism, thus contributing to the socio-cultural vitality of the urban landscape (Thomé-Ortiz, & Sosa, 2024).

Studies on locally-driven culinary projects in Quito underscore the potential of gastronomy to foster social cohesion and stimulate community-based economic development. These initiatives aim to safeguard culinary traditions while aligning with sustainable tourism and participatory heritage management principles (Espinoza & Rodríguez,2020).

The organization *Quito Eterno* exemplifies innovative cultural programming by incorporating gastronomy into guided heritage tours. Its educational approach leverages traditional foodways to narrate historical and cultural processes, thereby enriching collective memory and the urban identity of Quito (Fundación Quito Eterno.,2022)

Culinary events such as the *Fiestas de Quito* play a crucial role in publicly celebrating and revitalizing traditional cuisine. These festivals act as cultural showcases, reaffirming gastronomic heritage and providing platforms for intergenerational knowledge transmission and tourist engagement (Ecuador Food Tour,2022)

Popular travel media, including *Condé Nast Traveler*, have highlighted Ecuador's culinary

3662 *The Role of Gastronomy as a Cultural and Touristic* diversity, portraying gastronomy as a lens through which national identity and historical narratives are revealed. These accounts frequently position Quito as a focal point for culinary exploration (Kinsman,2022)

International travel journalism has emphasized the importance of local cuisine in cities like Quito, framing food as an entry point for understanding the cultural fabric of urban life. These representations contribute to the global visibility and touristic appeal of Ecuadorian gastronomy (Turner,2025)

In the same way focus group were used. The use of Focus Groups; according to (Hamui-Sutton, & Varela-Ruiz,2013). constituting a space of opinion to capture the feeling, thinking, and living of individuals, provoking self-explanations to obtain qualitative data. In the same for (Hamui-Sutton, & Varela-Ruiz,2013). this technique is considered as a type of group interview, since it requires sense to interview several people at the same time, however, the focus group focuses on the analysis of the interaction of the participants within the group and their reactions to the topic proposed by the researcher. The focus group was held for gastronomic actors.



Fig. 1. Focus Group

Analysis and Discussion

Currently gastronomy and tourism are intricately linked since they satisfy needs and are complementary when visiting a region or place since their motivations to mobilize revolve around the conception of food tasting and turn know other aspects of the place in question. Within this context, the Castro (2019) mentions that the main motivation for visitation is no longer just knowing the natural or architectural tourist attractions of a city or region but entering a world of customs and traditions that only the Based-on sustainability and responsible management of resources, regional cuisine can provide protection of the environment and the safeguarding of heritage and cultural values.

According to Cabeza & Prat (2012) indicates that cultural tourism offers the visitor a product of experience, experience, and emotion where the tourist seeks all the particularities of the site and is not satisfied with only its cultural value. Quezada et al.,(2012) mention that experiential or emotional tourism is increasingly identified with the true tourism product, which is in constant change that responds to various needs and new trends that are focused within the tourism market, where food for tourists is an essential factor since it is considered a physiological need of the human being, it could be said that "place we go, place we eat" that is why it is of vital importance to establish the primary relationship between cultural tourism already mentioned with the culinary and historical aspects that are part of gastronomy.

The downtown of Quito city presents the right conditions to be promoted as a tourist attraction, especially for gastronomic resources because the cuisine that is offered is recognized by visitors.

According to Brillat, (2010), an important tourist element is the local gastronomy oriented to a defined market segment. Culinary tourism should be understood not as the need to eat, but with several linked elements: the environment, the infrastructure of the service space, the attention, the uniformity, the colors and smells that transmit the knowledge and flavors to those who visit them, it is also understand that there is a close link between the culinary field and food since, as Armendáriz, (2013) mentions, these help to replenish and maintain the human being throughout his life; Therefore, gastronomic tourism is a type of tourism in which the gastronomy of the visited country is the fundamental fact that guides the visit. This type of tourism is presented today as an option.

Cultural tourism is becoming more and more popular among tourists, as mentioned by [26] the historic center of Quito is no exception, it is one of the most visited places on weekends, whether by national or foreign tourists, it is worth remembering what (Cabrera,2017) mentioned, mentioning that Quito was declared Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 1978 by UNESCO due to the influence of the Quito school of art and the sui generis where the actions of nature and man converge, in turn it is the city with the most temples by surface and in its streets remnants of history that still live in the heart of their town are hidden. For these reasons thousands of tourists visit the streets of *Carita de Dios* to learn about its culture and gastronomy and everything that the city can offer, for Bonete et al., (2018) when talking about the historic center of the city of Quito, the Tourists immediately associate it with its colonial and baroque architecture, but its culinary culture has always been latent, which is why many of its well-known streets have something else to offer, precisely its gastronomy.

For Trujillo, (2017) the cuisine of the region before the arrival of the Spaniards was a diet based on grains, vegetables, such as corn and the well-known RTAs (Andean Roots and Tubers) and endemic fauna such as the vicuña, the alpaca, guinea pig, the latter products mostly consumed

by the Incas in their ceremonies (Pazos-Barrera,2010).). "La Villa de Quito, definitively founded on December 6, 1534, was the setting in which the first experiences of adaptation of domestic species brought from Europe by the Franciscan priest Fray Jodoco Ricke were carried out" (p.111).

According to Díaz (2017) most products made in the city of Quito are the result of a fusion of ingredients. In what we know today as the Church of San Francisco was the most important tiánguez, along with that of the city of Cuzco, the largest and most well supplied in South America. Due to the commercial exchange with populations of the Sierra, the Coast, and the East, in addition to the exchange of utensils and knowledge of both techniques, procedures and methods of conservation and elaboration, the same ones that were enriching the culinary heritage that was formed in the city.

Sosa, & Thomé (2020). with the first culinary elaborations carried out in Quito and with some carried out in other regions of Ecuador, the first culinary enterprises begin to be created, many of them adaptations in halls for the proletariat and others built specifically for the elaboration of food and drinks, which is giving rise to gastronomic boulevards in the city of artisan origin, due to the need to have establishments to serve the new bourgeois class that is emerging in the city of Quito, thanks to the development of local cuisine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The city of Quito does not have extensive records or evidence of vernacular recipes for Romero (2018) most of the information found is recipe books with colonial products and preparations, the same ones that were found in monasteries and in family libraries located in the historic center, it could be suppose that these recipes have allowed the construction of the culinary heritage of the city of Quito, being part of the social imaginary in regard to rites and traditions, typical of their daily lives.

Espeso-Molinero (2019). mentions that, due to this, for both tourism and gastronomy professionals in this city, it is imperative to investigate, discern and value these preparations, because they include the identity part of the local cuisine. These investigations could allow connecting the academy, the State (Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador), the municipal government (Quito Tourism) and the tourism, hotel, and restaurant industry, to create policies that promote an increase in sustainable visitation to Ecuador. the tourist places of the historic center of the city such as: churches, museums, theaters, alleys, and the enjoyment of complementary activities such as the consumption of local cuisine, boosting the economy of existing places, or allowing the creation of new ventures by strengthening the modern culinary contribution.

In Latin America, historical cities have been referents of cultural tourism. In the Ecuadorian case in the city of Quito, the historic center that according to Hall & Mitchell, (2005) is the best preserved in Latin America has become a tourist attraction.

According to Duarte-Casar et al., (2022) these attributes make the historic center of a city a cultural tourism destination. However, in the case of Quito, cultural tourism has been limited to the visit of colonial art in the historic center, emblematic monuments, and trips to neighboring areas where gastronomy is seen more as a complement to all tourist activities but does not stand out. to be a strong reason for mobilization, in this case gastronomy is considered as a cultural reference since it is present from the historical records and beginnings of civilization, but it is only an axis in a broader field such as tourism.

One of the main strategies used by cities and communities to promote gastronomic tourism are culinary festivals, the creation of routes in which the restaurants Duarte-Casar et al.,(2022)

where the main preparations of the region are made are made known, even more so when they are prepared by a recognized local chef explaining the entire process from the collection and or hunting of the products and ending with the subtle touches at the time of assembling a signature dish as stated by Artieda-Ponce et al., (2021) gastronomic tourism establishes a relationship between a certain conglomerate of people, producing a cultural, patrimonial, economic and environmental phenomenon.

Results

Eating habits are the expression of the food beliefs and traditions of a population and are linked to the geographical environment and the availability of food Artieda-Ponce et al., (2021).

The factors that condition them are economic, religious, psychological, and pragmatic. Traditions and myths are determinants of these habits and intervene in the preferences and aversions that individuals manifest and play a key role in the preparation, distribution, and service of food Velastegui-Coque et al, (2023).

The term eating habit expresses a set of customs that determines the behavior of man in relation to food. It includes everything from the way you select food to the way you consume it or serve it to the people whose food is in your hands. Eating habits are the product of the interaction between culture and the environment, which are transmitted from one generation to another.

Considering the previous authors, "eating habits" are the knowledge one has of how to prepare products, how to eat in the family or within a social group, in other words, all the compartments that we have related to the use of food.

Traditional cuisine is a fundamentally social art, with local and traditional characteristics, but modern society has managed to facilitate its preparation, supported by the easy acquisition of raw materials that are grown, sometimes thousands of kilometers away. It is important, in modern cuisine, this base of different ethnic and cultural origins.

In the figure 2 we can see some traditional food of downtown of Quito City.





Fig. 2. Traditional Food

The study highlights that the culinary heritage of Quito's Historic Center is a social construct resulting from the fusion of indigenous and European cultures, giving it a unique character within the broader tourist offering. This fusion is evident in emblematic dishes such as fritada, seco de chivo, hornado, and locro de papas, which are not only culinary delights but also representations of the city's historical and cultural narratives.

Moreover, the study reveals that traditional cuisine in Quito's Historic Center transcends its nutritional function by offering tourists culturally immersive experiences. Local dishes not only fulfill fundamental dietary needs but also serve as conduits for engaging with the region's cultural identity. The findings highlight that tourists are primarily motivated by cultural interests, which in turn foster specific dynamics aimed at meeting their expectations and enhancing their overall experience.

The study underscores the importance of integrating traditional cuisine into the cultural tourism strategy of Quito's Historic Center. By doing so, it is possible to enhance the tourist experience, preserve culinary traditions, and strengthen the cultural identity of the city.

Conclusions

In this research, we can appreciate the profound relationship between gastronomy and cultural and historical aspects, among others, encompassed within a tourist field, the first being one of the main economic activities that take place there daily. The vast history in which the cuisine of the Quito city has developed allows the local gastronomy to be a factor of high cultural motivation for both national and foreign visitors, because that on the way to each one of the places of sale of food there is a history about its main products, procedures and techniques used, the same that makes its patrimonial character unquestionable and therefore positions it as a benchmark in the city, since it is present in all cultural spaces thus feeding the tourist industry of Quito.

The food practices are determined by the ancestral customs and traditions of the Quiteños people, the ancestral products have high nutritional values, however, at present the new generations are no longer dedicated to cultivating the land and planting these products, in addition to the way of feeding. It has changed due to the introduction of new chemical-based products, and young

people do not know how to prepare ancestral recipes.

This research demonstrates that traditional gastronomy plays a strategic role in shaping and projecting the cultural and touristic identity of Quito's Historic Center. Beyond its nutritional function, local cuisine serves as a symbolic vehicle that integrates ancestral knowledge, community practices, and urban dynamics, positioning itself as a fundamental component of intangible cultural heritage.

In this framework, culinary spaces such as heritage markets, traditional eateries, and gastronomic festivals operate not only as nodes of economic dynamism but also as mechanisms for social cohesion and identity valorization. The gastronomic experience, understood as a multisensory and narrative practice, significantly contributes to the differentiation of the tourism destination, fostering authentic cultural immersion for visitors.

However, the findings also reveal critical gaps, particularly related to the limited local appropriation of culinary heritage and the weak coordination between cultural, educational, and tourism policies. Thus, there is a pressing need to develop integrated strategies that promote food heritage education, sustainable tourism, and the active participation of local communities in the management of their culinary legacy.

In sum, the gastronomy of Quito's Historic Center represents a privileged interface between tradition and modernity, between identity and development. Strengthening its visibility through an interdisciplinary lens will allow it to be consolidated as a structural axis of a cultural tourism model that is inclusive, sustainable, and deeply rooted in the territory.

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