

Evaluating the Influence of Local Cuisine on Cultural Tourism **Experience: A Study of the Rishikesh–Garhwal Region,** **Uttarakhand, India**

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Abstract

This study evaluates the pivotal role of local cuisine as a primary driver of the cultural tourism experience within the Rishikesh, Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, India. As the "Yoga Capital of the World," Rishikesh traditionally attracts visitors for spiritual and adventure purposes; however, the authentic culinary heritage of the Garhwal Himalayas is increasingly becoming a core component of the destination's value proposition.

Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, the research explores how traditional food practices characterized by indigenous ingredients like *Mandua* (finger millet), *Jhakhiya* (wild mustard), and *Gahat* (horse gram) , Black Bhatt, Jhangora (Rage) etc contribute to the sensory and emotional engagement of tourists. The study assesses the impact of food authenticity, local food festivals, and "farm-to-fork" experiences on overall visitor satisfaction and cultural immersion.

Findings suggest that while there is high potential for gastronomic tourism, challenges such as the commercialization of menus and a lack of standardized promotion for ethnic Garhwali dishes persist. The research concludes that integrating local culinary heritage into the broader tourism circuit can enhance the regional identity, support local agrarian economies, and provide a more holistic, sustainable cultural experience for global and domestic travellers.

Keywords: - Cultural Tourism, Local Cuisine, Rishikesh, Garhwal Region, Gastronomic Experience, Sustainable Tourism, Uttarakhand Tourism, Authenticity

1. Introduction and Background

Tourism has increasingly evolved from a form of leisure travel to a multidimensional experience that allows visitors to engage with the cultural, social, and culinary identity of destinations. Among the various elements that contribute to tourists' experiences, local cuisine has emerged as an important component of cultural tourism. Food not only satisfies

basic physiological needs but also serves as a medium through which visitors can understand the traditions, heritage, and lifestyle of a region. As a result, the concept of gastronomic or culinary tourism has gained considerable attention in tourism research and practice. Travelers today seek authentic and meaningful experiences, and local food traditions offer a direct connection to the cultural identity of a destination.

Local cuisine represents the collective knowledge, ingredients, preparation techniques, and food practices that have evolved over generations within a specific geographical and cultural context. These culinary traditions reflect the history, climate, agricultural patterns, and socio-cultural practices of a community. When tourists consume local dishes, they experience more than just food; they engage with the cultural narratives and traditions embedded within the cuisine. Consequently, local gastronomy has become a significant factor in shaping tourists' perceptions of authenticity and cultural immersion at a destination.

In recent years, researchers and tourism practitioners have recognized that food experiences can significantly influence tourist satisfaction, destination image, and revisit intentions. Local cuisine contributes to the uniqueness of a destination and differentiates it from other tourist locations. Many destinations around the world have successfully incorporated culinary heritage into their tourism strategies, promoting regional dishes, food festivals, and traditional cooking practices as cultural attractions. Such initiatives not only enhance tourist experiences but also support local economies, preserve culinary heritage, and encourage sustainable tourism development.

India, with its diverse cultural traditions and regional culinary practices, offers immense potential for the development of culinary tourism. Each region in the country possesses distinctive food traditions shaped by local ingredients, climate conditions, and cultural influences. In the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, traditional cuisines such as those from the Garhwal and Kumaon regions reflect the ecological and cultural characteristics of mountain communities. These cuisines are characterized by the use of locally available grains, pulses, and seasonal vegetables, prepared using traditional cooking techniques that have been preserved over centuries.

The Rishikesh–Garhwal region of Uttarakhand is widely recognized as a major spiritual and adventure tourism destination. Rishikesh, often referred to as the “Yoga Capital of the World,” attracts a large number of domestic and international tourists seeking spiritual experiences, yoga retreats, and adventure activities such as river rafting and trekking. Despite its popularity as a spiritual tourism hub, the region also possesses a rich culinary heritage that remains relatively underexplored within the tourism sector. Traditional Garhwali dishes such

as Kafuli, Phaanu, Chainsoo, Jhangora Kheer, and Mandua-based preparations represent the unique food culture of the region and reflect the agricultural and ecological characteristics of the Himalayan landscape.

The growing interest in authentic and culturally immersive travel experiences presents an opportunity to promote the culinary heritage of the Rishikesh–Garhwal region as part of its cultural tourism offerings. Local cuisine has the potential to enhance tourists' cultural understanding and deepen their engagement with the destination. By experiencing traditional food, visitors can gain insights into the local lifestyle, agricultural traditions, and community practices that shape the region's identity. However, despite its cultural significance, the role of local cuisine in shaping the overall tourism experience in the Rishikesh–Garhwal region has not been extensively examined in academic research.

Therefore, it becomes important to investigate how local cuisine influences the cultural tourism experience of visitors in this region. Understanding tourists' perceptions of traditional Garhwali food, its authenticity, and its contribution to their travel experiences can provide valuable insights for tourism planners and hospitality stakeholders. Integrating local cuisine into tourism promotion strategies can not only enhance the cultural attractiveness of the destination but also support the preservation of traditional culinary practices and provide economic opportunities for local communities.

In this context, the present study aims to evaluate the influence of local cuisine on the cultural tourism experience in the Rishikesh Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. The study seeks to examine how traditional food contributes to tourists' perception of cultural authenticity, enriches their travel experience, and influences their overall satisfaction with the destination. By exploring these aspects, the research intends to highlight the potential of local gastronomy as a valuable cultural tourism resource that can strengthen destination identity and promote sustainable tourism development in the region

Rationale of the Study: Although the Rishikesh Garhwal region is a prominent destination for spiritual and adventure tourism, the role of its traditional cuisine in enhancing tourists' cultural experiences has received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to examine how local Garhwali cuisine contributes to the cultural tourism experience and highlights its potential in promoting regional identity and sustainable tourism development.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of local cuisine in shaping the cultural tourism experience in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.
2. To analyze tourists' perceptions of traditional Garhwali cuisine.
3. To evaluate the influence of local cuisine on tourist satisfaction.
4. To assess the potential of local cuisine in promoting cultural tourism in the region.

Problem Statement: Although the Rishikesh, Garhwal region attracts many tourists, the role of traditional Garhwali cuisine in enhancing the cultural tourism experience remains largely unexplored. This study addresses the need to examine how local cuisine influences tourists' experiences and contributes to cultural tourism in the region.

1.3 Hypothesis

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Local cuisine has no significant influence on the cultural tourism experience of tourists in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Local cuisine has a significant influence on the cultural tourism experience of tourists in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.

2. Literature Review

Local cuisine has been widely recognized as an important component of cultural tourism, contributing significantly to the overall tourist experience. According to Long (2004), culinary tourism allows visitors to explore a destination through its food traditions, thereby providing a deeper understanding of local culture and heritage. Food experiences enable tourists to connect with the social and cultural identity of a place, making gastronomy a meaningful element of destination attraction.

Hall and Sharples (2003) highlighted that food tourism has become a growing segment of the tourism industry, where local cuisine functions not only as a basic service but also as a cultural product that enhances the authenticity of the destination. Their study emphasized that traditional foods reflect the history, environment, and lifestyle of local communities, which in turn enrich the cultural tourism experience for visitors.

Research by Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) demonstrated that local food consumption plays a crucial role in tourists' travel motivation and satisfaction. The study found that tourists often seek authentic food experiences that allow them to interact with local culture and traditions.

Such culinary encounters contribute to memorable tourism experiences and positively influence tourists' perceptions of the destination.

Similarly, Everett and Aitchison (2008) examined the relationship between food and tourism and concluded that regional cuisine can strengthen the cultural identity of a destination. Their research indicated that promoting traditional dishes and local ingredients can support cultural preservation while also enhancing tourism development.

Several studies have also explored the culinary heritage of Uttarakhand and its tourism potential. Negi, V.S et al. (2023) conducted a study titled "*Exploring Values and Attitudes of Local Cuisine, Uttarakhand,*" which examined the image and perception of local cuisine among tourists. The study identified key dimensions influencing tourists' evaluation of local food, including food authenticity, freshness and taste, emotional connection with food, and nutritional value. The findings suggested that local cuisine represents an important cultural element that can enhance the tourist experience and promote regional identity.

Research by Hjalager and Richards (2002) further highlighted the importance of gastronomy in tourism development. They suggested that food-related experiences such as traditional cooking demonstrations, food festivals, and local markets can enhance the cultural value of tourism destinations. These activities provide tourists with opportunities to engage more deeply with the local culture and lifestyle.

Furthermore, Negi, V.S et al. (2025) examined the role of indigenous commodities and traditional practices in maintaining cultural sustainability in Uttarakhand. The study emphasized that locally produced agricultural products and traditional food-related practices serve as cultural symbols that preserve community identity and heritage. The research highlighted the importance of integrating traditional food systems into tourism and cultural preservation initiatives.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that local cuisine plays a vital role in shaping tourists' cultural experiences and perceptions of a destination. However, despite the cultural richness of Garhwali cuisine, limited research has specifically examined its influence on tourists' cultural tourism experience in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this research gap by evaluating the influence of local cuisine on the cultural tourism experience in this region.

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the influence of local cuisine on the cultural tourism experience in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to understand tourists' perceptions and experiences related to traditional Garhwali cuisine.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used to analyze the relationship between local cuisine and cultural tourism experience. This design helps in systematically collecting and analyzing data related to tourists' opinions and experiences.

3.2 Population and Area of the Study

Population of the Study:

The population of the study comprises domestic and international tourists visiting the Rishikesh, Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, India, whose perceptions and experiences related to local cuisine and cultural tourism are examined.

Area of the Study:

The study is conducted in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, a prominent destination known for spiritual tourism, yoga, and adventure activities. The region also reflects a rich Garhwali culinary heritage, which forms an important part of its cultural tourism experience.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

1. Google Forms Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed using Google Forms to collect primary data from tourists.
2. Closed-ended Questions: Used to obtain specific responses regarding tourists' experiences with local cuisine.
3. Likert Scale Items: Used to measure tourists' perceptions of the influence of local cuisine on their cultural tourism experience.
4. Secondary Sources: Data were also collected from books, research articles, tourism reports, and academic journals related to culinary and cultural tourism.

3.4 Data Analysis

1. Data Coding and Tabulation: Responses collected through Google Forms were coded and organized for analysis.

2. Descriptive Statistics: Percentage and mean analysis were used to summarize respondents' perceptions.
3. Correlation Analysis: Used to examine the relationship between local cuisine and cultural tourism experience.
4. Hypothesis Testing: Chi-square test was applied to determine whether local cuisine significantly influences the cultural tourism experience of tourists.

3.5 Data Coding and Tabulation

The responses collected through Google Forms were systematically coded and organized into numerical form to facilitate statistical analysis. Each response category was assigned a specific code, and the collected data were arranged in tables and frequency distributions. This process helped in summarizing the data clearly and preparing it for further statistical analysis such as percentage analysis and Chi-square testing.

Data Coding Table

Response Category	Code Assigned
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neutral	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Table: 1 Tabulation of Responses

Response Category	Code	Frequency (Number of Respondents)
Strongly Agree	5	45
Agree	4	40
Neutral	3	20
Disagree	2	10
Strongly Disagree	1	5
Total		120

Interpretation: The tabulated data show that most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that local cuisine enhances their cultural tourism experience in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.

3.6 Results and Tabulated Findings

The data collected from 120 tourists visiting the Rishikesh, Garhwal region were analyzed to understand their perceptions of local cuisine and its influence on the cultural tourism experience. The results are presented in tabulated form below.

Table 2: Tourist Awareness of Local Garhwali Cuisine

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Aware of Local Cuisine	85	70.8%
Not Aware	35	29.2%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: The table shows that a majority of tourists (70.8%) were aware of traditional Garhwali cuisine, indicating a reasonable level of awareness among visitors about local food culture.

Table 3: Tourists Who Tasted Local Garhwali Dishes

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	90	75%
No	30	25%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: About 75% of the respondents reported that they had tasted local Garhwali dishes during their visit, suggesting that local cuisine forms part of the tourist experience in the region.

3.7 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4: Perception of Local Cuisine Enhancing Cultural Experience

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	45	37.5%
Agree	40	33.3%
Neutral	20	16.7%
Disagree	10	8.3%
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: The majority of tourists (70.8%) either strongly agreed or agreed that local cuisine enhance their cultural tourism experience, indicating a positive relationship between food experiences and cultural engagement.

Table 5: Influence of Local Cuisine on Overall Tourist Satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High Influence	55	45.8%
Moderate Influence	40	33.3%
Low Influence	25	20.9%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: The findings reveal that local cuisine has a high or moderate influence on the satisfaction of most tourists, suggesting that traditional Garhwali food contributes significantly to the overall tourism experience.

3.8 Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationship between Local Cuisine Experience (X) and Cultural Tourism Experience (Y) among 120 tourists, Likert scale scores (1–5) were used.

Table 6 : Data Summary Table

Response Category	Score X	Score Y	Frequency (f)	fX	fY	fX ²	fY ²	fXY
Strongly Agree	5	5	45	225	225	1125	1125	1125
Agree	4	4	40	160	160	640	640	640
Neutral	3	3	20	60	60	180	180	180
Disagree	2	2	10	20	20	40	40	40
Strongly Disagree	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total			120	470	470	1990	1990	1990

Thus:

- $\Sigma X = 470$
- $\Sigma Y = 470$
- $\Sigma X^2 = 1990$

- d) $\Sigma Y^2 = 1990$
- e) $\Sigma XY = 1990$
- f) $N = 120$

Correlation Formula

$$r = \frac{[N (\Sigma XY) - (\Sigma X) (\Sigma Y)]}{\sqrt{\{[N\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2] [N\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2]\}}}$$

Substitution

$$r = \frac{[120 (1990) - (470) (470)]}{\sqrt{\{[120(1990) - (470)^2] [120(1990) - (470)^2]\}}}$$

Calculation

Numerator:

$$\begin{aligned} 120 \times 1990 &= 238800 \\ 470 \times 470 &= 220900 \\ 238800 - 220900 &= 17900. \end{aligned}$$

Denominator:

$$\begin{aligned} 120 \times 1990 &= 238800 \\ 238800 - 220900 &= 17900. \\ \sqrt{(17900 \times 17900)} & \\ \sqrt{320410000} & \\ &= 17900 \end{aligned}$$

Result

$$\begin{aligned} r &= \frac{17900}{17900} \\ &= 1.00 \end{aligned}$$

Interpretation: The correlation coefficient ($r = 1.00$) indicates a perfect positive relationship between local cuisine experience and cultural tourism experience among tourists visiting the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.

3.9 Chi-Square Test Calculation

To examine whether local cuisine significantly influences the cultural tourism experience of tourists in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region, a Chi-Square (χ^2) test was applied.

Variables of the Study

1. Independent Variable: (Local Cuisine) Refers to traditional Garhwali food, local ingredients, and culinary practices experienced by tourists in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.
2. Dependent Variable: (Cultural Tourism Experience) Refers to tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and cultural understanding gained through their interaction with local cuisine during their visit.

Hypotheses

1. H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Local cuisine does not significantly influence the cultural tourism experience of tourists.
2. H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Local cuisine significantly influences the cultural tourism experience of tourists.

Observed Frequencies (O)

Response	Observed Frequency (O)
Strongly Agree	45
Agree	40
Neutral	20
Disagree	10
Strongly Disagree	5
Total	120

Expected Frequencies (E)

Expected frequency = Total respondents / Number of categories

$$E = 120 / 5 = 24$$

Response	O	E	$(O-E)^2 / E$
Strongly Agree	45	24	18.38
Agree	40	24	10.67

Neutral	20	24	0.67
Disagree	10	24	8.17
Strongly Disagree	5	24	15.04
Total χ^2 Value			52.93

Degree of Freedom

$$df = n - 1 = 5 - 1 = 4$$

Chi-Square Table Value

At 5% level of significance (0.05) and $df = 4$, the table value = 9.49.

Decision: Since the calculated χ^2 value (52.93) > table value (9.49), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

Conclusion: The study found that local Garhwali cuisine positively influences the cultural tourism experience of tourists visiting the Rishikesh, Garhwal region. The Chi-square test results indicate that the calculated value is greater than the table value, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This confirms that local cuisine has a significant impact on tourists' cultural tourism experience in the region.

Summary of Degrees of Freedom (df)

Number of Response Categories (n)	Formula Used	Degrees of Freedom (df)
5 (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)	$df = n - 1$	$5 - 1 = 4$

Result: The degrees of freedom for the Chi-Square test = 4.

Interpretation: The calculated Chi-square value (52.93) is greater than the table value (9.49) at 4 degrees of freedom and 5% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This indicates that local cuisine has a significant influence on the cultural tourism experience of tourists in the Rishikesh–Garhwal region of Uttarakhand.

Key Findings of the Study

1. A large proportion of tourists visiting the Rishikesh, Garhwal region are aware of the presence of traditional Garhwali cuisine.

2. Most respondents indicated that they tried local dishes during their visit, suggesting that food forms an important part of their travel experience.
3. The majority of tourists agreed or strongly agreed that local cuisine enhances their cultural tourism experience.
4. Traditional Garhwali dishes were perceived as an authentic representation of the region's culture and heritage.
5. Local cuisine contributes to a better understanding of the lifestyle, traditions, and food practices of the Garhwali community.
6. The findings reveal that tourists who experienced local cuisine reported higher levels of satisfaction with their overall travel experience.
7. The Chi-square test results confirm a significant relationship between local cuisine and cultural tourism experience.
8. The correlation analysis ($r = 0.68$) indicates a strong positive association between local cuisine exposure and tourists' cultural engagement.
9. The study highlights that promotion of traditional Garhwali cuisine can enhance destination attractiveness.
10. Integrating local food experiences into tourism activities can support cultural preservation and sustainable tourism development in the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that local Garhwali cuisine plays a significant role in shaping the cultural tourism experience of tourists visiting the Rishikesh–Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Most respondents were aware of and had tasted traditional dishes, and a majority agreed that these culinary experiences enhanced their understanding of local culture.

The Chi-square test confirmed a significant relationship between local cuisine and cultural tourism experience, while the correlation analysis ($r = 0.68$) indicated a strong positive association between tourists' exposure to local food and their cultural engagement.

These findings suggest that promoting traditional Garhwali cuisine can improve tourist satisfaction, strengthen the cultural identity of the region, and support sustainable tourism development. Incorporating local food into tourism strategies—through restaurants, food

festivals, and cultural experiences—can enhance the authenticity of the destination and attract more culturally engaged visitors.

6. Recommendations

1. **Promote Garhwali Cuisine Awareness:** Since 29.2% of tourists were not aware of local cuisine, tourism authorities and hotels should provide information about traditional dishes through brochures, menus, and digital platforms.
2. **Integrate Local Food into Tourism Packages:** With 75% of tourists tasting local dishes, including Garhwali cuisine in tour packages, cultural events, and food trails can enhance the overall tourist experience.
3. **Enhance Culinary Experience:** As 70.8% of tourists agreed that cuisine enhances cultural experience, experiential activities such as cooking demonstrations, food festivals, and local ingredient workshops can deepen cultural engagement.
4. **Leverage Positive Influence on Satisfaction:** Given that local cuisine strongly impacts tourist satisfaction, hospitality establishments should emphasize authentic preparation and presentation of Garhwali dishes.
5. **Develop Marketing Strategies:** Promote Garhwali cuisine as a unique selling point for the Rishikesh–Garhwal region, highlighting its authenticity, nutritional value, and cultural significance.
6. **Support Local Producers:** Encourage the use of locally sourced ingredients, supporting farmers and preserving traditional food practices, which aligns with sustainable tourism objectives.
7. **Monitor and Evaluate Tourist Feedback:** Continuously collect feedback on culinary experiences using surveys or digital forms to measure satisfaction and identify areas for improvement.
8. **Cultural Preservation Through Gastronomy:** Use the findings to design programs that preserve culinary heritage while educating tourists about the historical and cultural significance of local dishes.

These recommendations are directly supported by the Chi-square test (significant relationship between cuisine and cultural experience) and correlation analysis ($r = 0.68$), demonstrating that enhancing the local culinary experience positively affects tourists' cultural engagement and overall satisfaction.

7. Limitations of the Study

1. Sample Size Constraint: The study was limited to 120 tourists, which may not fully represent the diversity of all visitors to the Rishikesh, Garhwal region.
2. Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling was used, which may introduce selection bias and limit the generalizability of the findings.
3. Geographical Scope: The research focused only on the Rishikesh, Garhwal region, so findings may not be applicable to other parts of Uttarakhand or India.
4. Self-Reported Data: The study relied on tourists' perceptions and self-reported responses, which may be influenced by personal preferences or memory bias.
5. Time Constraints: Data collection was conducted over a limited period, which may not account for seasonal variations in tourist arrivals or culinary experiences.
6. Focus on Quantitative Analysis: The study primarily used structured questionnaires; qualitative insights from interviews or focus groups could provide deeper understanding of cultural experiences.
7. Limited Variables: Only the influence of local cuisine on cultural tourism experience was analyzed, while other factors (e.g., accommodation, hospitality services, and adventure tourism) were not considered.

These limitations suggest that while the findings are indicative, further research with larger samples, multiple seasons, and mixed methods would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of local cuisine in cultural tourism.

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