Gastronomy Tourism and Sustainable Domestic Travel: The Role of Environment, Affordability, and Experience in Thai Travellers' Preferences

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Gastronomy tourism, also referred to as food tourism, has become an increasingly popular trend wherein travellers explore new cultures, traditions, and unique experiences. Among various tourist demographics worldwide, Thai travellers are particularly noted for their enthusiasm in exploring diverse culinary options. Due to Thailand's rich culinary heritage and varied food culture, Thai tourists tend to seek authentic regional dishes and flavours beyond conventional cuisine. This study examines the factors influencing domestic tourism by focusing on Thai travel preferences in gastronomy tourism within Phayao, a province in northern Thailand. An online survey was administered to 432 Thai travellers who have experienced Phayao's local gastronomy. The research specifically explores the relationships among cognitive experience (CE), emotional experience (EE), cultural engagement (CEg), cultural appreciation (CA), gastronomic affordability (GA), tourist intention (TI), and tourist experience (TE), and their effects on the intention to revisit Phayao for culinary purposes. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM). Findings indicate that cognitive, emotional, and cultural perceptions significantly affect emotional and environmental factors, which subsequently have a positive impact on tourists' motivations to visit Phayao for its food-related attractions. This study advances the understanding of the factors shaping Thai travellers' preferences in gastronomy tourism and provides practical recommendations for destination marketing strategies aimed at promoting travel to Phayao.

Keywords: Domestic Tourism, Thai Travelers, Gastronomy Tourism, Phayao, Cultural Factors, Economic Factors, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Introduction

Gastronomy tourism (GT), frequently termed food travel, has emerged as a significant global phenomenon, enticing travellers to engage with cultures primarily through their culinary traditions. This tourism niche encompasses an interest in cooking methods, ingredients, regional dishes, and interactive experiences such as cooking workshops and visits to local markets. It transcends the simple act of eating, encompassing the transmission of traditional knowledge, as cuisine often embodies the geographical characteristics, historical context, and social narratives of a region (Vukolic, Gajić, & Penic, 2025). For Thai tourists, GT possesses a distinctive appeal, rooted in the country's extensive culinary heritage and a profound cultural reverence for food. Thailand's cuisine is internationally recognised for its vibrant flavours, intricate combinations of spices and herbs, and diverse regional cooking techniques. Such a longstanding culinary tradition fosters an intrinsic motivation among Thai travellers to explore and appreciate gastronomic landscapes both domestically and abroad. Their pursuit centres on authentic tastes, unique regional specialties, and immersive food-related activities that provide culturally significant experiences. Within Thai society, food is not merely nourishment but a communal celebration, rendering GT an essential facet of travel preferences. This strong culinary affinity underscores the prominence of Thai travellers within the global food tourism market and highlights the importance of comprehending their preferences, particularly in domestic tourism contexts such as Phayao, a region noted for its distinctive gastronomic offerings (Kalpidis, Bersimis, & Tsartas, 2024).

The importance of GT is further amplified by Thailand's profound historical ties to its cuisine. Known globally for its colourful presentation, bold taste profiles, and sophisticated use of spices and herbs, Thai cuisine reflects regional diversity through varied ingredients and culinary practices. From the spicy curries of the central plains to the richly flavoured dishes of the south, the nation's culinary landscape is remarkably diverse. Food is deeply embedded within social customs, serving as a shared experience among friends and family and symbolising hospitality and warmth intrinsic to Thai culture. In the context of travel, cuisine assumes a unique role for Thai tourists. Given its centrality in daily life, discovering new culinary environments is perceived as an opportunity to extend gastronomic knowledge while honouring traditional roots. This intimate relationship between food and culture inspires a natural enthusiasm among Thai travellers to explore culinary heritage both within the country and internationally. In light of the growth in domestic tourism, especially following disruptions to international travel, Thai tourists are increasingly drawn to regional culinary offerings. Consequently, destinations such as Phayao in northern Thailand have gained recognition as compelling food tourism sites.

Phayao province, situated in northern Thailand, is distinguished by a rich array of culinary delights shaped by its unique historical and cultural influences (Galarraga & Martinez de Albeniz, 2025). The local gastronomy draws on the broader traditions of northern Thai cuisine while incorporating region-specific practices that have evolved

over time. The area's fertile landscape and natural resources significantly contribute to defining the distinctive flavours of Phayao's food. For domestic travellers, Phayao represents an opportunity to experience lesser-known but vibrant elements of Thailand's culinary culture. As GT's popularity grows, the province's traditional dishes, including specialties like Khao Soi—a curry noodle soup—as well as various grilled meats and fresh vegetables, attract visitors interested in both the cuisine and its wider cultural context (Hsu, Liu, & Lin, 2022). Phayao offers more than mere dining experiences; its markets, cooking schools, and food festivals provide interactive opportunities that deepen tourists' understanding and appreciation of local culinary customs.

With the ongoing expansion of Thailand's tourism industry, GT is assuming an increasingly prominent role. The nation's extensive and varied culinary heritage positions it as a potential leader in the international food tourism market (Madhyamapurush et al., 2024). Thai tourists, in particular, stand to gain from this development as they seek novel flavours and deeper engagement with local food cultures. Food tourism offers many the chance to reconnect with traditional culinary roots while simultaneously exploring innovative gastronomic experiences. Phayao, with its rich culinary traditions and heritage, is well placed to capitalise on the rising interest in authentic, locally rooted food experiences. The province's emphasis on genuine culinary participation resonates with global tourism trends that prioritise immersive and culturally enriching travel. As domestic tourists increasingly seek to explore less frequented destinations within Thailand, Phayao is well positioned to benefit from the growing appeal of GT. Its unique local cuisine and opportunities for hands-on culinary involvement render it an attractive destination for food enthusiasts.

Furthermore, Phayao's potential in GT is bolstered by the commitment of local producers, farmers, and chefs who preserve and promote culinary traditions. Collaborations with community members and stakeholders enable the province to present its food culture authentically and sustainably (Praesri et al., 2022). These local actors are instrumental in cultivating an environment that encourages repeat visitation, fostering greater appreciation for the province's culinary heritage while supporting sustainable development within the GT sector. Through GT, travellers engage with a destination's culture, history, and identity in a distinctive manner. For Thai tourists, food is a fundamental element shaping their tourism choices and preferences. Phayao, with its abundant culinary resources and dynamic food culture, offers an ideal environment to explore the complexities of GT (Rakpa et al., 2023). By actively embracing food tourism, the province can continue to strengthen its competitive advantages and attract an expanding market of culinary travellers, ensuring a sustainable and culturally enriching future for the region's tourism industry.

Research Objective

This study seeks to identify the determinants influencing Thai tourists' preferences for gastronomy tourism in Phayao, with a particular focus on economic, cognitive, cultural, emotional, and environmental factors that shape their intention to visit the region. Data were collected via an online survey involving 432 Thai travellers who have previously experienced the local gastronomic offerings of Phayao.

Research Organization

The structure of the research is as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature focusing on gastronomy tourism and the factors influencing domestic travel in Phayao. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the data collection process, key variables, and analytical techniques employed. Section 4 presents the research findings alongside a discussion of their implications. Finally, Section 5 offers the concluding remarks.

Related Works

Wondirad, Kebete, & Li (2021) investigated the impact of food tourism on regional development in the Basque Country. By employing qualitative interviews alongside quantitative tourism data, they found that food tourism substantially contributed to both economic growth and the preservation of cultural heritage. However, their focus was limited to economic and cultural effects, lacking consideration of wider contextual factors. Similarly, Prayag et al. (2020) studied culinary tourism in Spain and Italy to assess its precise effects on regional communities. Their analysis, which incorporated interviews with both residents and tourists, revealed that while food tourism enhanced regional economies, it also led to challenges such as the commercialisation of ethnic traditions. This study did not, however, identify long-term impacts on traditional authenticity and sustainability. Richardson (2021) examined the role of gastronomy within sustainable tourism development in Thailand. Using a mixed-method approach combining fieldwork and expert interviews, the research concluded that authentic culinary experiences increased tourist satisfaction and supported environmental sustainability, underscoring food tourism's dynamic role in sustainable development. This study was confined to specific regions and did not encompass a national perspective. The characteristics of street food and their influence on tourist behaviour were explored by Jeaheng & Han (2020). Through both qualitative and quantitative methods, they identified 45 attributes grouped into nine dimensions, finding that these significantly shaped traveller behaviour, with perceived difficulties weakening this relationship. The small sample size, however, limits generalisability.

Nugroho (2022) investigated the effect of gastronomy tourism on the destination image of Lombok Island, Indonesia, by analysing travel blogs and social media content. The findings indicated that positive culinary engagement enhanced Lombok's image, attracting more international tourists. The study's reliance on online data restricted insights into on-site experiences. Research into the influence of gastronomy festivals on tourist behaviour showed that such events increased visitor numbers, expenditure, and loyalty, particularly through interactive food-related activities. However, this was limited to a single festival, restricting broader applicability. Polat & Aktaş-Polat (2020) analysed the contribution of food tourism to rural development in the Loire Valley through

interviews with regional producers and tourism operators. They found that gastronomy tourism supported regional agriculture and preserved traditional heritage, thereby fostering economic growth. The study's focus on local producers excluded other stakeholders. Hall (2020) examined the impact of culinary tourism on regional food systems in Napa Valley by surveying farmers and restaurateurs. Results suggested that while food tourism brought economic benefits, it also exerted pressure on local food practices, highlighting the necessity for sustainable approaches to balance development and conservation. This study was limited by its exclusion of tourist perspectives and concentration on specific culinary aspects.

Maraña et al. (2024) studied the effects of gastronomy tourism on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention in Laguna through an online survey of 250 participants, analysed using SPSS. They found that factors such as culinary affordability, hygiene, customised menus, and consistent quality significantly influenced satisfaction, which in turn correlated with increased revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth.

Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. (2023) focused on the role of cultural gastronomy in tourism development in Vojvodina, examining hospitality workers' views on heritage preservation and environmental responsibility through a survey of 508 industry professionals. The findings emphasised the importance of the Vojvodina Hungarian community in maintaining and promoting local cuisine, with recommendations for tourism marketing and reliable food offerings. The study's limitation was its focus on industry workers, neglecting tourist opinions.

Boonlae & Wongmonta (2020) explored Thai travellers' perceptions of integrated marketing communication tools, satisfaction with promotional mixes, and the effectiveness of cultural tourism assets in Chanthaburi Province. Employing quantitative analysis of data from 400 tourists through t-tests and ANOVA, complemented by in-depth interviews with 20 officials, the study highlighted the need to improve accessibility, platform usability, and promotional strategies, proposing an integrated communication approach to enhance tourism. Its focus on a single province limits broader applicability. Yodsurang et al. (2022) examined challenges faced by Community-Based Tourism (CBT) regarding heritage resource management amid tourism growth. Using a layered clustering database of 549 groups from public and private sector organisations, they identified three main clusters: historical district-shopping tourism, nature-ecotourism, and cultural landscape-agricultural tourism. These groups shared resource-based interests and approaches to tourism organisation, linked with regional authorities, highlighting how heritage is interpreted differently across clusters. The data's regional specificity limits generalisability, though the findings supported policy reforms at local and national levels.

Sokolova et al. (2021) assessed the prospects for expanding domestic gastronomy tourism in Russia under COVID-19 restrictions, employing a SWOT analysis. Their results revealed that gastronomy tourism positively impacted local economies during travel limitations and is a key factor in enhancing territorial tourist appeal and promoting eco-tourism. They noted the importance of local support and favourable investment climates for successful development. The analysis was limited by its regional focus, restricting application to other countries. Christou & Pericleous (2023) explored factors shaping tourist perceptions within domestic tourism through a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis of 394 respondents, supplemented by qualitative data from 40 informants. They found that social interactions and quality time with companions significantly influenced positive domestic tourism perceptions. Additional critical factors included culture, cleanliness, price, and uniqueness. The research offered valuable management insights but was limited to a specific demographic, restricting the breadth of perspectives. Pamukçu et al. (2021) investigated the influence of regional cuisine and geographically indicated products on gastronomy tourism development by surveying 391 visitors and potential visitors to Bolu. Their analysis demonstrated that geographically indicated products had the greatest impact on gastronomy tourism growth, accounting for 60%, followed by regional cuisine at 37.7%. The study's regional limitation reduces its applicability elsewhere.

Methodology

The study investigates the factors influencing Thai travellers' preferences for GT in Phayao. The development of hypotheses centres on analysing the roles of emotional, cognitive, and cultural experiences in determining intentions to revisit. Data were collected via surveys, and statistical methods, including SEM, were utilised to assess the effects of these factors on travellers' intentions to return.

Hypothesis Development

A hypothesis is a proposed explanation or prediction regarding the relationship between two or more variables, which can be examined through data analysis and research. Within analysis, hypotheses serve to verify whether specific expectations or predictions are supported by empirical evidence. In this study, hypotheses form the foundation of the research by modelling potential relationships among various factors—such as emotional, cognitive, and cultural involvement, as well as environmental perceptions—with TI and TE to revisit Phayao for gastronomy tourism. Each hypothesis suggests a precise cause-and-effect relationship between the identified variables. The conceptual framework illustrating these hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): CE directly increases TI by encouraging awareness and understanding of Phayao's cooking offerings, leading to interest and plans for a revisit.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): EE positively impacts TI by creating a lasting connection with Phayao's cuisine. CEg moderates this effect, improving emotional relationships and inspiring tourists to revisit.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): CA indirectly affects TI by improving GT, which bridges the relationship between traditional engagement and travellers' revisit plans.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): GA influences the relationship between TE and TI, ensuring cognitive stimulation is accessible and motivating tourists to revisit.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Environmental Perception (EP) positively impacts TE. Favourable perceptions of Phayao's

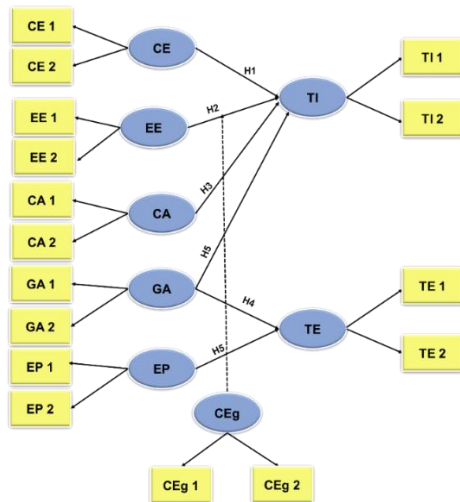emotional relationship and food-related environment encourage return visits.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Hypothesis.

Evaluation Variables

• *Emotional Experience (EE)*

These characteristics focus on the emotional bond tourists establish with the culinary heritage of the destination. The satisfaction and excitement derived from discovering new flavours, sampling local dishes, and engaging with the food heritage generate a memorable EE that influences tourists' decision-making.

• *Cognitive Experience (CE)*

Cognitive dynamics refer to the intellectual engagement of tourists as they explore regional food cultures. This encompasses the knowledge acquired regarding preparation methods, ingredients, and the historical context of the dishes. Tourists who actively engage cognitively and assimilate information about the culinary culture of a destination are more likely to perceive the experience as enriching.

• *Cultural Appreciation (CA)*

CA involves the recognition, respect, and comprehension of a destination's distinctive traditions, cultures, and values, especially in relation to its cuisine. This appreciation cultivates a profound connection between tourists and the location.

• *Environmental Perception (EP)*

EP refers to how travellers perceive the surroundings and ambiance of a destination, including its physical features, atmosphere, cleanliness, and local food settings. These perceptions influence their overall satisfaction and decisions regarding whether to revisit.

• *Tourist Intention (TI)*

TI refers to a traveller's likelihood or willingness to return to a particular destination, shaped by factors such as satisfaction, previous experiences, and the perceived value of the visit.

• *Gastronomic Affordability (GA)*

GA refers to the perceived value for money of local

culinary options, which influences tourists' motivation to explore regional cuisine. When cuisine is considered reasonably priced, it encourages repeat visits and enhances overall tourist satisfaction.

• *Cultural Engagement (CEg)*

CEg refers to the active involvement of travellers in experiencing and appreciating the local culture, traditions, and customs. This participation strengthens their emotional connection, enriches their visit, and cultivates a strong intention to revisit destinations such as Phayao.

• *Tourist Experience (TE)*

TE denotes the overall satisfaction and emotional connection that travellers develop during their visit. It encompasses sensory, cognitive, and emotional interactions with the destination, which collectively influence their memories and future intentions.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through a public survey involving 432 Thai tourists who had visited Phayao and engaged with its regional cuisine. The analysis examined the influence of various factors including economic considerations, emotional experiences, cognitive understanding, cultural impacts, and environmental attributes—on their intention to revisit Phayao for gastronomy tourism. Demographic information such as gender, age, income, education, lifestyle travel preferences, and food-related travel motivations was analysed to identify behavioural patterns among travellers. The official currency of Thailand, Thai Baht (THB), was used in economic-related questions. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic details.

Table 1: Demographic Details of the Participants.

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (N=432)
Gender	
Male	180
Female	252
Age	
18-30 Years	150
30-45 Years	160
45+ Years	122
Income Level	
10,000-25,000 THB	150
25,000-50,000 THB	180
Above 50,000 THB	102
Lifestyle Travel Preferences	
Preference for Culinary Tourism	304
Preference for Nature and Adventure Tourism	128
Food-Related Travel Motivation	
Desire to Explore New Cuisines	280
Seeking Authentic Regional Flavours	152
Lifestyle Travel Preferences	
Preference for Culinary Tourism	250
Preference for Cultural Heritage Tourism	100
Preference for Nature and Adventure Tourism	82
Food-Related Travel Motivation	
Desire to Explore New Cuisines	230
Seeking Authentic Regional Flavours	202

Questionnaire

The questionnaire assessed the variables influencing Thai tourists' preferences in GT. Table 2 presents the evaluation of the effects of EE, CE, CA, EP, TI, and GA. Each variable was measured using two questions. The study utilised a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5) to determine the presence and intensity of these factors, providing valuable insights into how these elements impact tourists' GT choices in Phayao.

Table 2: Questionnaires for the Participants.

Variable	Question 1	Question 2
EE	How would you describe your emotional response to the flavours of Phayao's cuisine?	How excited were you to experience the local flavours of Phayao?
CE	How much did you learn about Phayao's food culture and cooking techniques?	How engaging was exploring the history behind Phayao's regional food practices?
CA	How much did you appreciate Phayao's culinary heritage and its cultural uniqueness?	How well does Phayao's food reflect its traditions and values?
EP	How would you rate the cleanliness and atmosphere of Phayao's food markets and restaurants?	How favourable was Phayao's environment for enjoying food experiences?
TI	How likely are you to revisit Phayao for its food in the future?	How strong is your intention to recommend Phayao for food tourism?
GA	How affordable were the food options in Phayao?	How would you rate the value for money of Phayao's food offerings?
CEg	How engaged were you in learning about Phayao's cultural food practices during your visit?	How much did engaging with Phayao's local cuisine shape your experience in the area?
TE	How satisfied were you with your overall food experience in Phayao?	How would you rate the impact of Phayao's food experiences on your overall visit satisfaction?

Statistical Methods

Statistical methods are mathematical procedures employed to analyse, interpret, and present data, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships. Such analyses offer a structured approach to understanding variables and their interactions, ensuring conclusions are supported by empirical evidence. SEM is a key statistical technique utilised in this study. By integrating factor analysis and regression, SEM assesses the direct, indirect, and total effects among variables. This method is crucial for understanding how emotional, cognitive, and cultural engagements influence travellers' preferences and intentions, thereby offering valuable insights into the dynamics of GT in Phayao.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM is a versatile technique employed to uncover complex relationships among variables. In this study, SEM assesses the links between emotional, cognitive, and cultural perceptions and their impact on emotional and environmental factors. Its strength lies in its capacity to analyse both direct and indirect effects, thereby exposing the underlying mechanisms influencing Thai travellers' preferences. SEM provides a comprehensive insight into how these factors affect tourists' intentions to revisit Phayao for GT. Its use guarantees precision in evaluating intricate relationships, establishing SEM as an essential instrument for fulfilling the research objectives.

Result and Analysis

This section discusses the data collection procedure and presents the findings derived from structural and quantitative analyses. Table 3 outlines the distribution, response, and participation rates of the questionnaires. It also provides the proportion of positive responses relative to negative ones. These results offer a comprehensive overview of participant engagement and data reliability, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of the research methodology in assessing the GT preferences of Thai travellers.

Table 3: GT Response Rate Regarding Questions.

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Distributed Questionnaire	520	98%
Returned Questionnaire	490	94.23%
Not Returned	30	5.77%
Questionnaire in Usual Condition	465	89.42%
Unacceptable Quality	25	4.81%
Total Response Rate	490	94.23%
Appropriate Response Rate	465	89.42%

Measurement Model

Table 4 presents the estimation framework alongside the reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity of the variables and indicators. Key measures, including indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), demonstrate that the constructs within the measurement model are both reliable and valid. These metrics are essential for ensuring the accuracy of the research findings and confirming that the constructs under investigation are consistently measured across the dataset. High values of Cronbach's alpha and CR indicate strong internal consistency, while AVE reflects the extent to which a construct explains the variance in its indicators. Figure 2 provides a visual depiction of the measurement model's structure and performance in assessing the influences on Thai travellers' GT preferences. This illustration facilitates a clearer understanding of the interrelationships among factors, reinforcing the model's robustness. The integration of these reliability and validity assessments enhances the credibility of the analysis and substantiates the conclusions derived from the data.

Table 4: Measurement Model Evaluation Results.

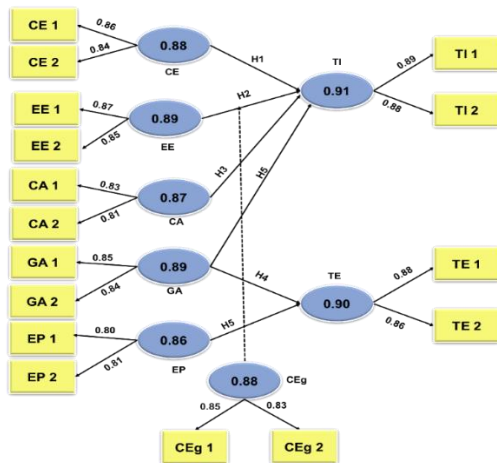| Variable	Indicator	Loading	CR	AVE	Alpha (α)
CE	CE1	0.86	0.91	0.75	0.88
	CE2	0.84			
EE	EE1	0.87	0.92	0.78	0.89
	EE2	0.85			
CA	CA1	0.83	0.90	0.74	0.87
	CA2	0.81			
EP	EP1	0.85	0.91	0.77	0.89
	EP2	0.84			
GA	GA1	0.80	0.88	0.71	0.86
	GA2	0.81			
TI	TI1	0.89	0.93	0.80	0.91
	TI2	0.88			
CEg	CEg1	0.85	0.90	0.73	0.88
TE	CEg2	0.83			
	TE1	0.88	0.92	0.76	0.90
	TE2	0.86			

Figure: Architecture for Measurement Model that Combines Loading and Alpha (α) Values.

Table 5 presents the discriminant validity analysis. The diagonal values represent the square roots of the AVE for each variable, confirming the internal consistency of the hypotheses. The off-diagonal values indicate the correlations between variables, which are lower than the corresponding diagonal values. This confirms strong discriminant validity, demonstrating that the variables are distinct and effectively capture unique aspects of Thai travellers' GT preferences.

Table 5: Measurement Model Discriminant Validity.

Variables	CE	EE	CA	EP	GA	TI	TE	CEg
CE	0.85	0.62	0.65	0.60	0.58	0.56	0.61	0.59
EE	0.62	0.87	0.68	0.65	0.63	0.60	0.62	0.66
CA	0.65	0.68	0.88	0.70	0.65	0.62	0.67	0.83
EP	0.60	0.65	0.70	0.84	0.72	0.69	0.63	0.71
GA	0.58	0.63	0.65	0.72	0.86	0.74	0.60	0.67
TI	0.56	0.60	0.62	0.69	0.74	0.89	0.61	0.65
CEg	0.59	0.66	0.83	0.71	0.67	0.65	0.62	0.88
TE	0.61	0.62	0.67	0.63	0.60	0.61	0.87	0.62

Structural Model

Using linear regression analysis, the structural model identifies the relationships between latent variables (LVs). Table 6 and Figure 3 illustrate that hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H5 receive strong support, indicating significant effects of CE, EE, and cultural appreciation on TI and environmental perception. Hypothesis H4 shows moderate significance, indicating a weaker association between food affordability and TI. Overall, CE and EE exert the most substantial influence on TI.

Table 6: Result Values for Structural Model.

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	R²	Standard Error (SE)	Result
H1: CE → TI	0.42	6.05	0.000	0.55	0.06	Well-Supported
H2: EE → TI→ CEg	0.40	5.80	0.000	0.53	0.07	Well-Supported
H3: CA → TI →	0.38	5.30	0.000	0.51	0.08	Well-Supported
H4: GA → TE→TI	0.35	4.90	0.000	0.47	0.09	Moderately-Supported
H5: EP → TE	0.44	6.45	0.000	0.56	0.07	Well-Supported
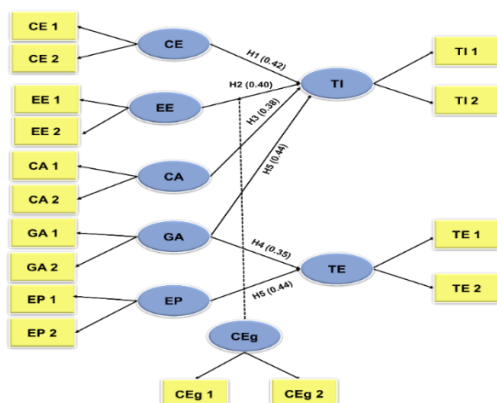
Figure 3: Framework for Structural Model Using Path Coefficient (β) Values.

Discussion

The principal determinants influencing Thai tourists' preferences in gastronomy tourism within Phayao are analysed, focusing specifically on the region's culinary offerings. The SEM analysis confirms strong support for hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, indicating that tourists' emotional, cognitive, and cultural experiences substantially influence their intention to revisit the area. Cognitive engagement enhances travellers' comprehension and appreciation of local cuisine, thereby generating interest and motivating return visits. Emotional experience fosters an affective bond with the food, strengthening the desire for continued culinary exploration. Cultural appreciation further reinforces these relationships by deepening respect for the

traditional heritage embodied in Phayao's gastronomy, which in turn shapes revisit intentions. Hypotheses H4 and H5, concerning gastronomy affordability and environmental perception, respectively, reveal how economic and environmental considerations impact tourists' choices. Together, these hypotheses provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting tourist behaviour in this context.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, tourists who have experienced travel fatigue increasingly prioritise gastronomy tourism, placing greater value on local discovery and cultural interaction. Within Thailand, consuming authentic Thai cuisine aligns with national goals emphasizing environmental sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and rich cultural engagement. A significant number of Thai travellers incorporate environmental concerns when selecting destinations to explore regional food. According to Baloch et al. (2023), developing sustainable tourism frameworks necessitates enhanced focus on environmental preservation. Eco-conscious food experiences, such as farm visits and organic food trail explorations, not only support environmental protection but also heighten tourist interest. Khatib (2023) highlights the importance of integrating tourism practices with environmental stewardship to prevent further ecological degradation. Economic factors remain influential, especially as the country recovers economically post-COVID-19. Seyfi, Hall, & Saarinen (2024) observe that substituting international travel with domestic tourism reduces expenses while promoting sustainability, thus benefiting local communities without the complexities often associated with international tourism. Correspondingly, Farstad et al. (2024) note that since the pandemic, many populations have developed a greater appreciation for local attractions, reflected in Thai tourists' preference for affordable and satisfying dining experiences within their own country.

The presence of cultural food enhances the appeal of gastronomy tourism (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021). Jasrotia, Kamila, & Patel (2023) argue that sustainable gastronomy is inherently connected to place and culture, offering tourists meaningful opportunities to engage with local traditions. In Thailand, the availability of authentic regional dishes, cooking classes, and night markets contributes to visitor satisfaction and encourages repeat visits. Stalmirska & Ali (2025) suggest that urban food tourism plays a role in sustainable development by fostering cultural connections between diverse communities and their environments. Global models serve as useful references for Thailand's efforts to develop its gastronomy tourism. Alonso et al. (2025) explain how Vietnam utilises collaborative capabilities, such as partnerships between local actors and the adoption of innovative approaches, to strengthen its culinary tourism sector. Applying a similar strategy could enable Thai stakeholders to capitalise on the country's culinary diversity and communal bonds. The authors further note that sustainable tourism supports recovery after the pandemic and underscores the importance of embedding food tourism within broader sustainability initiatives.

The integration of digital technologies is increasingly acknowledged as vital for enhancing tourism experiences and promoting sustainability. Authorities can employ digital platforms to improve visitor management and service delivery. Dang & Nguyen (2023) demonstrate that digital tools facilitate richer Thai cooking experiences for tourists, while Rodrigues, Eusébio, & Breda (2023) argue that tourism digitalisation enhances sustainable development by improving access, reducing errors, and enabling data-informed decision-making. Overall, Thailand's gastronomy tourism sector is well positioned to promote sustainable domestic travel by emphasising natural environments, affordability, and cultural heritage. By embracing international best practices, advancing technological integration, and highlighting local cuisine, Thailand can continue to attract and satisfy domestic tourists.

Conclusion

Culinary tourism in Phayao has emerged as a significant influence on Thai travellers' preferences and their intentions to revisit. The findings highlight the essential roles of emotional and cultural experiences in shaping tourists' motivations to return for further culinary exploration. Stronger emotional connections with local cuisine and a profound appreciation of traditional food culture notably increase the likelihood of repeat visits. An online survey of 432 Thai travellers, detailing their experiences with Phayao's regional cuisine and focusing on their preferences and satisfaction levels, also considered environmental and economic factors, such as food affordability. The study robustly supports hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, emphasising the importance of engagement with Phayao's culinary offerings. By prioritising authentic and immersive food experiences, Phayao strengthens its reputation as a destination for gastronomy tourism, promoting sustainable development and contributing to broader tourism growth. Ultimately, the research provides valuable insights into the factors driving gastronomy tourism in Thailand. However, as the study is based on self-reported data from a single location, future research should incorporate more diverse samples and extend to wider geographic areas to improve generalisability and deepen understanding of long-term effects.

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