



Influence of Gastronomical Practices on Tourist Satisfaction in Selected Ecotourism Destinations in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract: Gastronomy is about understanding how food and host culture are intertwined. This study examines the influence of gastronomical practices on tourist satisfaction in selected ecotourism destinations in Southwest Nigeria, focusing on Whispering Palms in Lagos State and Ilaji Sports Resort in Oyo State. A total of 385 respondents participated in the study across the two designated ecotourism destinations. Whispering Palm Resort (n = 187) and Ilaji resort (n = 198). The sample includes both workers and tourists. The data was collected through interviews, observations, and questionnaires. The data obtained was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Descriptive Statistics such as pie chart, tables (frequencies and percentages), means and standard deviation was used to answer the results while inferential statistics was used to test the hypotheses. In terms of gender distribution, 210 respondents (54.5%) were male while 175 (45.5%) were female, demonstrating a fairly balanced gender representation across both sites. Whispering Palm Resort had 102 males and 85 females, whereas Ilaji resort had 108 males and 90 females, demonstrating that both destinations attract a mixed-gender population in terms of both employment and visitation. Marital status statistics revealed that 53.0% of respondents were married, 40.3% were single, and 6.7% were divorced. Both sites demonstrated similar patterns, demonstrating that ecotourism in these regions appeals to both individuals and family-oriented visitors or employees. Among staff responders exclusively, the departmental distribution indicated the highest representation in accommodation (13.5%), followed by service (12.5%), recreation (10.1%), production (10.4%), and bar (7.5%). This research suggests a relatively young workforce with prospects for continuous professional development and institutional knowledge acquisition. It also implies that ecotourism in these destinations is a burgeoning sector with recent employment opportunities, particularly for younger professionals.

Keywords: Gastronomical, Ecotourism, Whispering Palm, Ilaji Sport Resort, Lagos, Oyo State.

1. Introduction

Gastronomy is about understanding how food and host culture are intertwined (Everett, 2012). In addition to being a means of subsistence, food is a cultural artefact and is frequently used as a prism through which to view and appreciate the local way of life (Galvez *et al.*, 2017) points out, enjoying other people's cuisine is a component of learning about their culture. Individuals who are passionate about gastronomy not only consume local cuisine but also prepare it and study culinary traditions (Boesen *et al.*, 2017). Events or activities in tourist locations that enable visitors to enjoy the place are referred to as tourist experiences (Walker & Moscardo, 2014).

Gastronomy is an integral part of the tourism experience, as it reflects the cultural identity of a destination and offers visitors a unique insight into the local way of life (Alamu, *et al.* 2019). According to Presenza and Del Chiappa (2013), restaurants at ecotourism destinations that source locally help to improve local food production, build meaningful relationships with local food stakeholders, and shape the perception of a destination and place identity. An integrated approach is necessary to ensure food safety, which is the cornerstone of good gastronomical management practices. Gastronomical practices play a critical role in shaping tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations, where visitors are often highly sensitive to health, environmental quality, and sustainability standards. Safe and well-managed food systems enhance

tourists' confidence in a destination by reducing health risks associated with chemical and biological contaminants in food (World Tourism Organisation, 2006). Knowledge drawn from fields such as epidemiology, toxicology, nutrition, public health, and environmental planning supports the delivery of hygienic and nutritionally sound meals, which directly influences tourists' comfort and overall experience (Hering et al., 2006). Thoughtful menu planning that incorporates locally sourced ingredients not only improves food freshness and safety but also enhances cultural appreciation and tourists' connection to the destination (Richards, 2012). Efficient procurement, storage, and preparation practices help minimize food spoilage and contamination, ensuring consistency in meal quality and safety (Hering et al., 2006). Tourists who experience well-prepared, safe, and culturally relevant cuisine often associate such gastronomic experiences with higher destination value, which contributes positively to overall satisfaction and reinforces the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations (Hall & Sharples, 2008). The objective of study is to identify the influence of gastronomical practices on tourist satisfaction in selected ecotourism destinations in southwest Nigeria. This is crucial for promoting sustainable tourism development and enhancing the overall visitor experience. This research will help identify opportunities for collaboration between the tourism and culinary sectors, ultimately contributing to the conservation of the natural environment and the socio-economic development of local communities.

2.0 Study Area

The study was conducted using two selected resorts (Whispering Palm) Lagos State and Ilaji Sport Resort) Oyo State Southwestern Nigeria. The southwest area lies between longitude 2°31'1" East and latitudes 6°21'1" and 8° 37'1" N (Agboola, 1979), with a total land area of 77,818 km². The study area is bounded in the east by Edo and Delta states, in the north by Kwara and Kogi states, in the west by the Republic of Benin, and in the south by the Gulf of Guinea.

Lagos State, located in the southwestern part of Nigeria, is a region of considerable economic importance despite its relatively small land mass. Covering approximately 3,577 square kilometres, it is one of the smallest states in Nigeria by size. However, Lagos State is highly urbanised and densely populated, with a rapidly growing population drawn from diverse ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria. Its urban centres host intense commercial, industrial, and social activities, making the state a major economic hub in the country.

Oyo State, also situated in southwestern Nigeria, is one of the largest states in the country, with a total land area of about 28,454 square kilometres. The state features a varied landscape of plains, hills, and forested areas and shares boundaries with Ogun, Osun, Kwara, and Lagos States. With an estimated population exceeding 8 million people, Oyo State is among the most populous states in Nigeria and is home to diverse ethnic groups, including Yoruba, Hausa, and Fulani. Major urban centres such as Ibadan, Oyo, and Ogbomosho serve as key population and economic hubs, while agriculture, trade, and services form the backbone of the state's economy.

Lagos State was chosen due to its vast culinary diversity and significant traffic to resorts. As a major state in south-west Nigeria, the state is renowned for its high tourism activities, making it an ideal location to study a wide range of gastronomical practices (Adebayo, 2019). The state's diverse culinary scene offers a rich variety of local and international cuisines, attracting tourists and culinary enthusiasts alike, while Oyo State was chosen for its central location in south-west Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2021). Its position makes it accessible and representative of the region's culinary practices. Additionally, the historical and cultural significance of Oyo, combined with its unique culinary traditions, provides a rich context for the study. Other states in the southwest region of Nigeria, like Ogun State, Ekiti State, Ondo State, and Osun State, were not included majorly because of the glaring similarities in their culinary and tourism activities, as this similarity might result in redundant data, reducing the uniqueness of the study.

This study was streamlined to Whispering Palms in Lagos State and Ilaji Sport Resort, Oyo State. The two resorts were selected based on a fundamental characteristic intrinsic to the concept of a resort: their proximity to either natural or man-made features. This approach aligns with the definition of resorts as establishments that provide recreational and leisure activities often set in picturesque or strategically advantageous locations (Smith, 2010; Swarbrooke, 1999; Agarwal, 2002). The inherent value of these settings lies in their ability to enhance the overall guest experience, drawing visitors through their unique environments and attractions. Also, they were selected purposefully based on similarities in location and

management of their kitchens and restaurants. Thus, the two selected resort sites were Whispering Palm and Ilaji Resort.

3.0 Materials and Method

A preliminary survey was first carried out so as to help the researcher familiarize and acquire first-hand information about the study area and other relevant information that would guide the research work on gastronomical management practices and customs of two selected ecotourism resorts in Southwest Nigeria. The survey aimed to identify the specific practices, challenges, and unique features of each resort's gastronomical operations, to understand the culinary customs unique to each resort and to establish a foundation for detailed field research and data collection. The data was collected through structured interview with key staff and questionnaire were distributed to a random sample of tourists to collect their feedback on the culinary experience.

A total of 385 respondents participated in the study across the two designated ecotourism destinations: Whispering Palm Resort (n = 187) and Ilaji resort (n = 198). The sample includes both workers and tourists with staff-specific statistics reported separately (n = 208). In terms of gender distribution, 210 respondents (54.5%) were male while 175 (45.5%) were female, demonstrating a fairly balanced gender representation across both sites. Whispering Palm Resort had 102 males and 85 females, whereas Ilaji resort had 108 males and 90 females, demonstrating that both destinations attract a mixed-gender population in terms of both employment and visitation. The data obtained was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and using Morgan method to determine the number of staff for the research population.

The questionnaire was self-constructed based on the variables under study and the literature review. The questionnaire contained 10 items on 5 likert scale on SA: Strongly Agreed (5), A: Agreed (4), U: Undecided (3), D: Disagree (2), SD: Strongly Disagreed (1) which was administered in person and used to access and measure the effect of obtainable gastronomical practices on tourists' satisfaction.

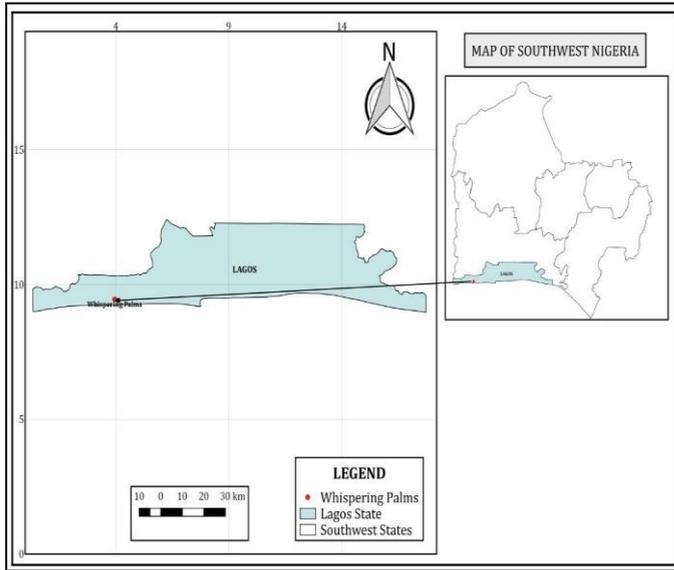


Figure 1: Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry Lagos State.

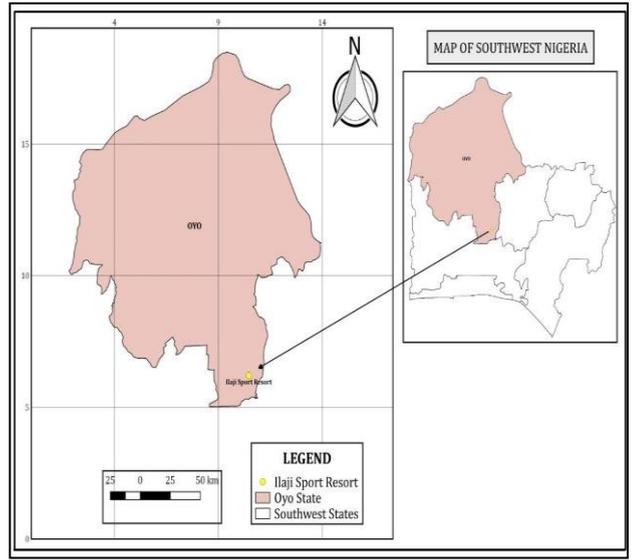


Figure 2: Ilaji Sport Resort, Ilaji Oyo

4.0 Discussion of Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

A total of 385 respondents participated in the study across the two designated ecotourism destinations: Whispering Palm Resort (n = 187) and Ilaji resort (n = 198). The sample includes both workers and tourists with staff-specific statistics reported separately (n = 208). In terms of gender distribution, 210 respondents (54.5%) were male while 175 (45.5%) were female, demonstrating a fairly balanced gender representation across both sites. Whispering Palm Resort had 102 males and 85 females, whereas Ilaji resort had 108 males and 90 females, demonstrating that both destinations attract a mixed-gender population in terms of both employment and visitation.

The bulk of respondents (61.6%) were between the ages of 25 and 44, followed by 27.0% who were aged 45–54, and 11.4% who were 55 and above. This distribution implies that the ecotourism locations primarily engage with a middle-aged, economically active population, consistent with global trends in sustainable tourism. Ilaji resort received somewhat more respondents in the younger age category, which may imply more appeal among younger working professionals or a younger workforce generally.

Marital status statistics revealed that 53.0% of respondents were married, 40.3% were single, and 6.7% were divorced. Both sites demonstrated similar patterns, demonstrating that ecotourism in these regions appeals to both individuals and family-oriented visitors or employees. This variability in marital status supports the need for destination services that cater to both solitary and group encounters.

Among staff responders exclusively, the departmental distribution indicated the highest representation in accommodation (13.5%), followed by service (12.5%), recreation (10.1%), production (10.4%), and bar (7.5%). This shows an operational concentration on guest-facing functions such as housing, recreation, and hospitality. Ilaji resort had slightly higher representation across all divisions, maybe due to a bigger service offering or more diversified employment structure.

Regarding years of service, a substantial proportion of workers (65.9%) had worked between 1 and 10 years, while 26.0% had between 11 and 20 years of experience, and just 8.2% had served more than 20 years. This suggests a relatively young workforce with prospects for continuous professional development and institutional knowledge acquisition. It also implies that ecotourism in these destinations is a burgeoning sector with recent employment opportunities, particularly for younger professionals.

Table 4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents by Location (N = 385)

Variable	Category	Whispering Palm Resort (n = 187)	Ilaji resort (n = 198)	Total	%
Gender	Male	102	108	210	54.5%
	Female	85	90	175	45.5%
Age	25–44	115	122	237	61.6%
	45–54	50	54	104	27.0%
	55 and above	22	22	44	11.4%
Marital Status	Single	74	81	155	40.3%
	Married	98	106	204	53.0%
	Divorced	15	11	26	6.7%
Department (<i>Staff only</i>) (n = 208 total)	Production	18	22	40	10.4%
	Service	23	25	48	12.5%
	Bar	14	15	29	7.5%
	Accommodation	24	28	52	13.5%
	Recreation	19	20	39	10.1%
Years of Service (<i>Staff only</i>)	1–10	64	73	137	65.9%
	11–20	26	28	54	26.0%
	21–30	8	9	17	8.2%

4.2 Key Ingredients Used in Preparing Dishes

Figure 4.1 revealed the key ingredients used in preparing dishes. The major ingredient used in preparing dishes is the locally sourced ingredients (44.9%), followed by ingredients that define the region's cuisine (26.3%). Imported ingredients ranked lowest, having a percentage of 25.1%.

Figure 4.2 shows the cooking techniques used in preparing the ecotourism destination dishes. 100% of the respondents chose that they used grilling in preparing their ecotourism destination dishes; another 100% of the respondents chose that they used frying in preparing their ecotourism destination dishes; 100% of the respondents chose that they used steaming in preparing their ecotourism destination dishes; and 100% of the respondents chose that they used stewing in preparing their ecotourism destination dishes.

Figure 4.3 shows common beverages and accompanies served in the ecotourism destination. 20.7% of the respondents chose that they served local drinks in their ecotourism destination dishes, 31.1% of the respondents chose that they served imported drinks in their ecotourism destination dishes, 19.9% of the respondents chose that they served condiments in their ecotourism destination dishes, and 28.3% of the respondents chose that none were served sauce in their ecotourism destination dishes.

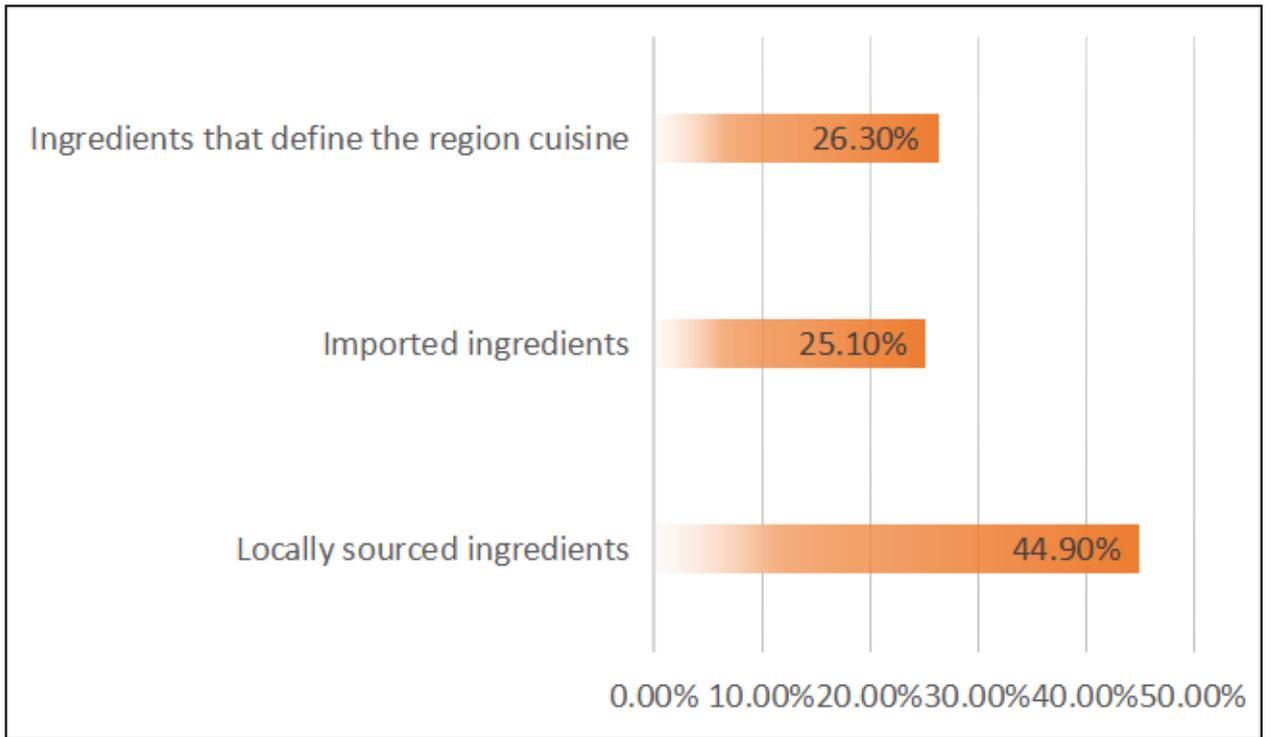


Figure 1: Key Ingredients Used in Preparing Dishes

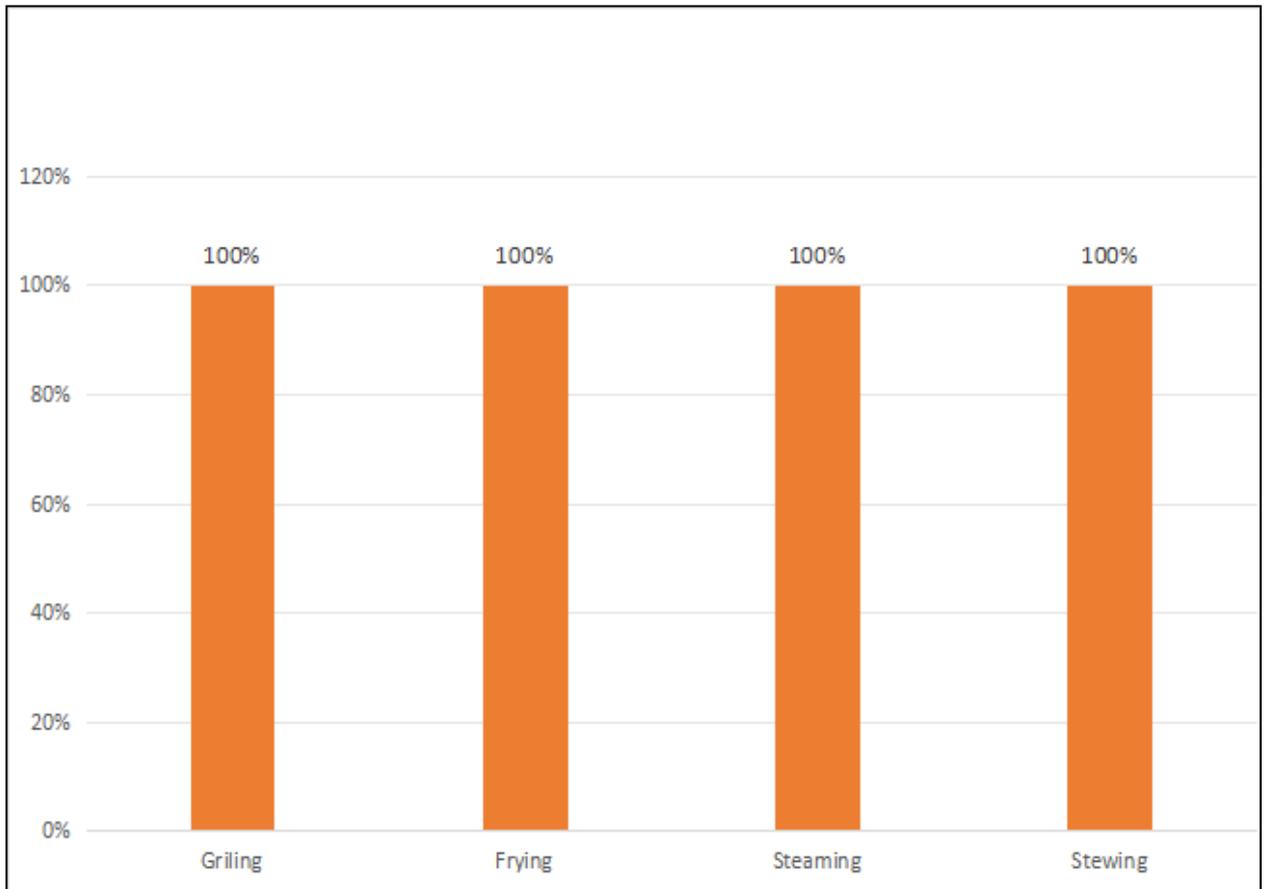


Figure 2: Cooking techniques used in preparing dishes

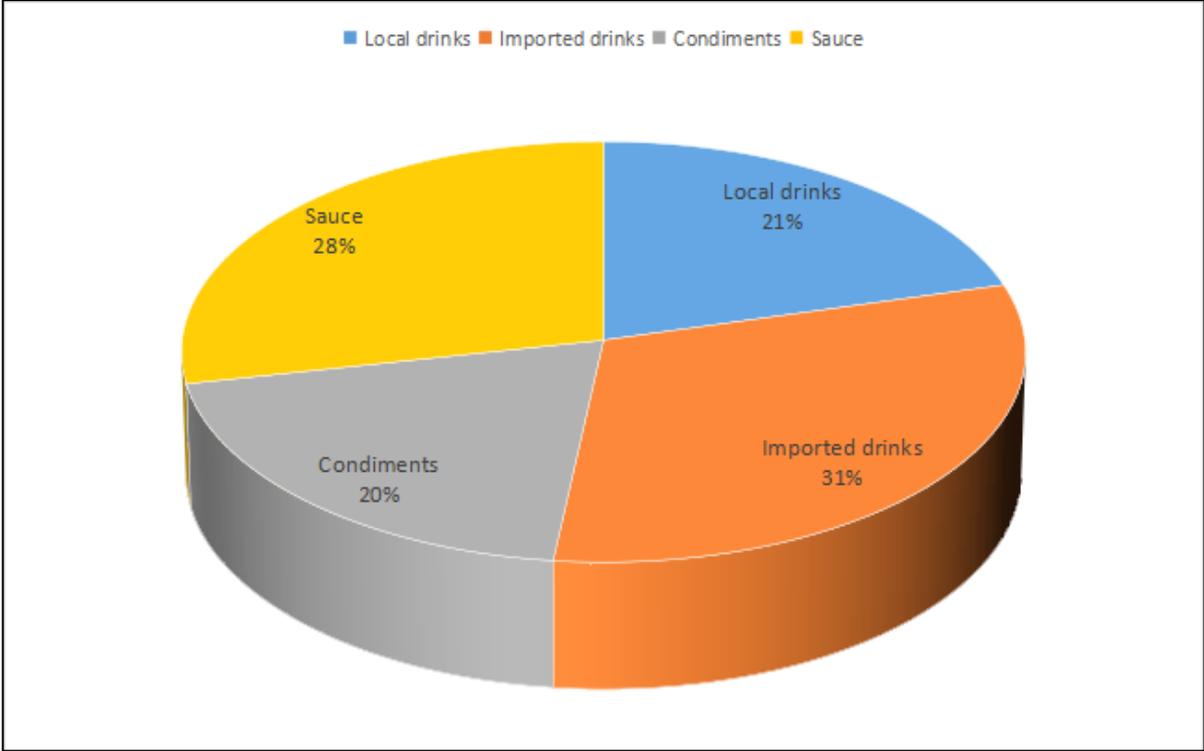


Figure.3: Common Beverages and Accompanies Served in the Ecotourism Destination

4.3 Effect of Obtainable gastronomical practices on tourists of the selected ecotourism destinations

Table 1 shows the effect of obtainable gastronomical practices on tourists of the selected ecotourism destinations. Item 1 with a mean response of 3.54 agreed that the tourists were satisfied with their gastronomical experience during their visit to the ecotourism destination. Item 2 with a mean response of 3.82 agreed that the local gastronomical offerings enhance the tourist cultural experience during their visit to their ecotourism destination. Item 3 with a mean response of 3.77 agreed that the tourists enjoyed the taste and flavours of the local dishes during their visit to the ecotourism destination. Item 4, with a mean response of 3.50, indicates that respondents agreed that tourists perceive the menu offerings as sufficiently diverse and varied, enabling them to explore a wide range of local flavours during their visit to the ecotourism destination.

Item 5, which recorded a mean response of 4.06, shows that respondents generally agreed that tourists regarded the gastronomical offerings as providing good value for money during their visit to the ecotourism destination, suggesting a favourable balance between cost and quality. Item 6 with a mean response of 3.99 agreed that the tourists' gastronomical experience influences their intention to revisit the ecotourism destination. Item 7 with a mean response of 3.88 agreed that the tourists recommended the ecotourism destination to their friends and family through the local gastronomic experiences they had during their visit to this ecotourism destination. Item 8 with a mean response of 3.80 agreed that the ecotourism destination's gastronomical practices encouraged interaction and engagement with the local community during their visit to this ecotourism destination. Item 9 with a mean response of 3.77 agreed that the ecotourism destination's gastronomical practices contributed to making the tourists' visit

memorable. Item 10 with a mean response of 3.72 agreed that the ecotourism destination gastronomic practices are proud of representing the local culinary traditions. With a grand mean of 3.32, it can be concluded that obtainable gastronomic practices have a positive effect on tourists of the selected ecotourism destinations.

Table 1.0: Effect of Obtainable gastronomic practices on tourists of the selected ecotourism destinations

S/N	VARIABLE	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	I am satisfied with their gastronomic experience during their visit to our ecotourism destination	79	186	30	42	48	3.54	Agreed
2	The local gastronomic offerings enhance my cultural experience during their visit to our ecotourism destination	168	107	27	40	43	3.82	Agreed
3	I enjoyed the taste and flavors of the local dishes they tried during their visit to our ecotourism destination	178	79	36	47	45	3.77	Agreed
4	I find the menu offerings diverse and varied enough to explore different local flavors during their visit to our ecotourism destination	91	153	38	48	55	3.50	Agreed
5	I perceive the value for money concerning the gastronomic offerings during their visit to our ecotourism destination	128	152	33	34	38	4.06	Agreed
6	My gastronomic experience here influences their intention to revisit the ecotourism destination	155	117	34	43	36	3.99	Agreed
7	I recommend this ecotourism destination to my friends and family through the local gastronomic experiences I had during my visit to this ecotourism destination	173	104	33	40	35	3.88	Agreed
8	This ecotourism destination's gastronomic practices encourage interaction and engagement with the local community during my visit to this ecotourism destination	172	89	31	53	40	3.80	Agreed
9	This ecotourism destination's gastronomic practices contribute to making my visit memorable	183	70	39	48	45	3.77	Agreed
10	This ecotourism destination's gastronomic practices is proud of representing the local culinary traditions	153	109	31	49	43	3.72	Agreed
	TOTAL						3.78	Agreed

KEY: SA (Strongly Agreed), A (Agreed), U (Undecided), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree)

Table 2 showed the summary of the linear regression analysis on the influence of gastronomical practice on tourist's satisfaction in selected ecotourism destination. From the table, the calculated $F_{(2,383)} = 1.323$ obtained from the analysis of data was statistically greater than the critical f-value (.000) at $p < 0.05$ which means that the null hypothesis will be rejected. This result implies that gastronomical practice significantly influences tourist's satisfaction in selected ecotourism destination.

Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Gastronomical Management Practice and Custom on Tourist's Satisfaction in Selected Ecotourism Destination.

Variables	Regression value	R ² -value	Remark
Influence of Gastronomical Practice on Tourist's Satisfaction in Selected Ecotourism Destination	1.204	0.000	Sig

$P < 0.05$, S – Significant

4.4 Obtainable Gastronomical Practices in the Ecotourism Destination

Figure 4.4 displays the distribution of various gastronomical activities found in the two ecotourism destinations Ilaji resort and Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry. The practice of community-based dining and incorporation of native ingredients were the most widespread in both sites, each contributing for 18.0% overall, with equal contributions of 9.0% from Ilaji resort and Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry respectively. Indigenous cuisine festivals followed closely with a total of 17.6%, somewhat higher in Ilaji resort (9.2%) than Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry (8.4%). Culinary storytelling sessions were reported at 15.6%, with Ilaji resort providing 8.0% and Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry 7.6%. Wild food foraging experiences also featured strongly with a total of 15.1%, comprising 8.5% from Ilaji resort and 6.6% from Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry.

Sustainable food practices accounted for 10.2% of the overall gastronomical engagements, including 4.8% from Ilaji resort and 5.4% from Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry. Traditional food preservation techniques were the least practiced overall at 5.5%, comprising 2.5% from Ilaji resort and 3.0% from Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry.

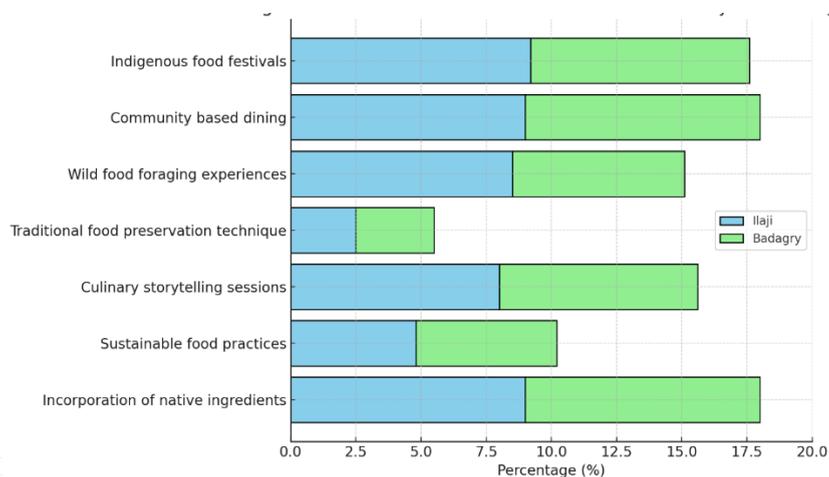


Figure 4: Obtainable Gastronomical Practices in the Ecotourism Destination

4.5 Various Obtainable Gastronomical Practices implemented in the selected ecotourism

Based on observation, the various obtainable gastronomical practices in the selected ecotourism destinations of Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry and Ilaji resort reflect a strong blend of cultural richness, sustainability, and customer-centered service, as observed in their kitchen operations, food

preparation processes, and service delivery. In both locations, kitchen operations are structured and hygienic, with a notable emphasis on the use of locally sourced ingredients. In Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry, for example, seafood such as grilled fish and prawns are sourced fresh from local fishermen, while in Ilaji resort, farm-to-table practices are evident with the use of fresh vegetables, yam, and poultry from nearby farms. Both destinations demonstrate efforts to reduce food waste, maintain cleanliness, and adopt environmentally responsible practices, including the use of energy-saving appliances and proper waste sorting.

During food preparation, traditional cooking techniques are widely embraced. In Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry, methods such as open-fire grilling, steaming in banana leaves, and the use of traditional spices are common, preserving the authenticity of the local cuisine. Ilaji resort incorporates Yoruba culinary styles, including pounded yam with egusi or efo riro. Dietary needs are also considered at both sites, with vegetarian options and allergy-sensitive meals available on request, reflecting an inclusive food culture.

Service delivery in both ecotourism locations enhances the overall gastronomic experience. At Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry, meals are often served in eco-friendly dishes, such as calabashes or reusable trays, accompanied by explanations of the historical or cultural significance of each dish. In Ilaji resort, guests are engaged through live cooking stations. Staff in both destinations are trained to offer warm hospitality and detailed knowledge about the food being served, ensuring that visitors not only eat but also learn. Altogether, the gastronomic practices observed in Whispering Palm Resort, Badagry and Ilaji resort contribute to a memorable, culturally immersive, and environmentally conscious ecotourism experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that gastronomic management practices not only attract tourists but also promote sustainable tourism by emphasizing local traditions and resources. The study also concludes that gastronomic practices are crucial for the development of ecotourism in Southwest Nigeria. They not only enhance the tourist experience but also contribute to the sustainability and cultural preservation of the destinations. Therefore, continuous improvement and strategic management of gastronomic practices are essential for the sustainable growth and development of ecotourism in the region.

Recommendations

- i. Effects of integrating gastronomic practices on the overall development and sustainability of ecotourism destinations in Southwest Nigeria.
- ii. Gastronomic practices and its impacts on tourist satisfaction and ecotourism development across different regions within Nigeria.
- iii. Effects of Integration of modern technology into gastronomic practices on tourist engagement, satisfaction, and operational efficiency in ecotourism destinations.
- iv. Role and impact of community involvement in the planning, implementation, and management of gastronomic practices in ecotourism destinations.

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