

The Current Situation of Exploiting the Single Food Tourism Products in Ben Tre Province

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Abstract: - Currently, enjoying culinary products in tourism destinations is a thriving trend in modern tourism business and is one of the tourism motivations of tourists. Culinary culture is considered as one of the humanistic tourism resources, not only meeting the enjoyment of tourists, but also a means of advertising, promoting and developing tourism, thereby introducing Traditional cultures of ethnic groups, local and nation. Many culinary tourism products have been interested by localities to build, act as a "bridge" to sign production and consumption contracts, However, the exploitation of Vietnamese culinary cultural values for the development of tourism products is still at a low level and ineffective.

This presentation is to analyze culinary tourism products, the current situation of exploiting culinary culture as a single culinary product, and at the same time, it also made a number of recommendations related to the effective exploitation of Vietnamese culinary cultural values in the development of culinary tourism products in Ben Tre.

Keywords: - culinary culture, Ben Tre culinary culture, culinary tourism products, Ben Tre.

1. Introduction

Characteristics of nature, culture, traditional society and processing, together with the way of combining spices, each countryside has created unique and attractive special dishes. The chef Yan (famous for the Yan Can Cook program), after many times in Vietnam, evaluated "I love Vietnamese food because the dishes are harmonious between yin and yang, so it's always light and nutritious, delicious and unique". And former Chef of Softel Metropole Hanoi Hotel, Mr. Didier Corlou (French) - specializing in cooking Vietnamese dishes for Heads, VIP guests also said: "Spices and flavors from natural vegetables have created a unique character in the dish of Vietnamese people and this is a rare feature ". At the Marketing Conference held in Ho Chi Minh City, Philip Korler, the founder of the Modern Marketing School of the world, suggested "Vietnam should become the world's kitchen". At the 26th-2019, World Travel Awards (World Travel Awards) for the region of Asia and Oceania, for the first time, Vietnam was honored in the category of Asia's top culinary destination. This event once again showed that the

Vietnamese culinary arts increasingly affirmed its attractiveness to international friends. This is also a rich treasure for "smokeless industry" to exploit and form unique tourism products bearing Vietnamese identity.

Vietnamese cuisine has been known around the world, "In June 2015, Intrepid Travel, one of the world's leading food travel providers, confirmed that the two most popular destinations for their visitors are India and Vietnam. In September 2016, a press release by Ross Tur, a successful Russian foreign cuisine company, said that Vietnam joined the top 5 most attractive countries for gourmets (with India and Korea). The world's most prestigious travel magazine, Lonely Planet, ranks Vietnam among the top 10 most experienced culinary tours in the world. The famous newspapers of the United States, CNNGo or famous international newspapers such as National Geographic and Amusing Planet all praised Vietnam as the "culinary paradise" of the attractive destination of street food. Hanoi is ranked number 1 by The Telegraph of the United Kingdom among

the 16 most attractive food cities in the world (Phan Thi Thu Hien, 2016, p.83).

These events once again showed that the Vietnamese culinary arts increasingly affirmed its attractiveness to international friends. This is also a rich treasure for "smokeless industry" to exploit and form unique tourism products bearing Vietnamese identity. In the process of tourism development, cuisine is an indispensable element, both playing a role in satisfying the basic needs of tourists in the travel process, and food is considered as one of the human resources to be interested in exploiting and developing culinary tourism products to serve the needs of experience and enjoyment of tourists.

Ben Tre, a land of "nine dragons" created exclusively by nature, is a branch of Tien River, and converges with the Hau river into the Mekong River. As a land endowed with nature, cool climate, fresh water all year round, there is always a fruit garden and many unique cultural values expressed

in production activities, beliefs, customs, festivals, literature, art, how to eat, dress, stay, travel... For the tourism, natural conditions and cultural values not only create the environment and conditions for tourism to arise and develop, but also determine the size, genre, quality and effectiveness of tourism activities (Phan Thi Ngan, 2020, p.103). However, the exploitation of culinary cultural values, including Vietnamese culinary cultural values to develop tourism products in general and single culinary tourism products in particular in Ben Tre still stops at a low level and not yet effective. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the current situation and propose solutions so that the exploitation of the values of culinary culture, as well as the single culinary tourism product is becoming a requirement of practice to to promote tourism development in Ben Tre.

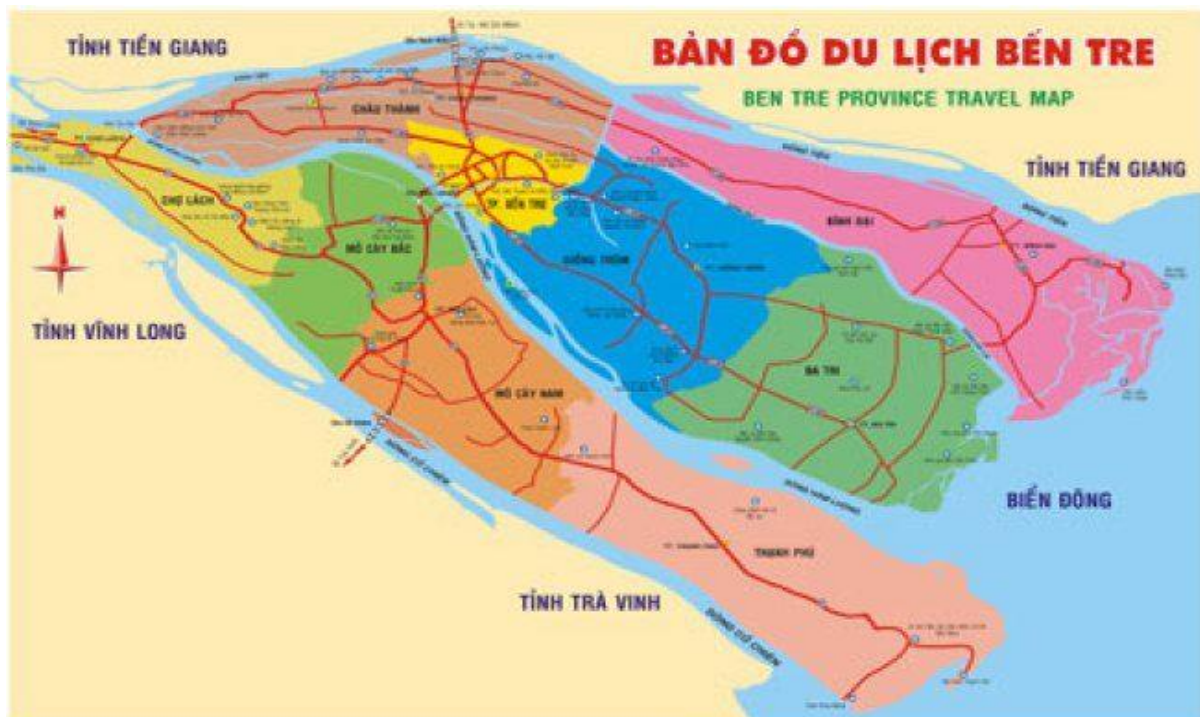


Figure 1. Tourism Map of Ben Tre Province

2. Content

2.1. The concept of culinary tourism products

Until now, many research works of authors and organizations have had concepts about tourism products. Specifically, there are typical concepts:

According to the 2017 Law on Tourism of Vietnam: "Tourism product is a collection of services on the basis of exploiting natural resources to satisfy the needs of tourists during travel" (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017).

From the point of view of modern economy: Tourism products include both intangible and tangible products that serve the needs of people in travel. Therefore, tourism products are very plentiful, always changing according to the needs of tourists and the development of the economy in each country and territory.

Food tourism product is one of a system of tourism products designed to serve and satisfy the needs of tourists. In terms of type, there are currently 4 names related to the type of culinary tourism in the world, namely: Gourmet Tourism or Gourmet Travel; Culinary Tourism; Gastronomy Tourism and Food Tourism.

Global Food Tourism Association (Global Food Tourism Association) said that: The name Food Tourism has the meaning of covering, including other names. According to this organization, "Food" in Food Tourism does not mean only about simple dishes or food, but also includes beverages accompanying the tourist's eating process.

Classification of culinary tourism products according to Dr. Le Tuan Anh has three products: Package culinary tourism products, culinary travel products, single food tourism products (Le Tuan Anh, 2019).

Package tourism food products (gourmet tour): The product type of gourmet tour is different from other travel products. The main goal of tourists when consuming this package-based culinary tourism product is to experience and enjoy cultural values, creative uniqueness and traditional cultural features in culinary activities of destination. The purpose of serving the normal physiological eating needs is secondary. Features of this all-inclusive culinary travel product are usually short, deployed in the morning, afternoon or evening, and can last from 2 to 4 hours.

Food tourism products (cooking lessons): For the type of food tourism product: Experience cooking and enjoying traditional food. This type of culinary travel product is combined and is a product component in the whole package tour, or it can also be a single product serving freelance tourists. (FIT:

Free International Tourist) during a trip to their destination. The content of this culinary tourism product can include: content introduced about the processing, about dishes, drinks, shopping for ingredients / harvesting, performing food processing activities, enjoy the dish and finish.

Single food tourism product: For the type of culinary tourism product that is the dishes and drinks included in the package tour program or exists in a single form to serve the needs of individual visitors or group of travelers who do not purchase a package tour. For this type of product, tourists can enjoy the experience in the travel program or the single service they purchased.

Thus, a single culinary tourism product is viewed differently from a culinary tourism product. A single culinary tourism product plays a role in meeting physiological and dietary needs of tourists, the dishes and drinks themselves play a role as a component of the overall tourism product. Here eating and drinking does not act as a complete product, but as an ingredient constituting the package tourism product, or in other words, the components of the individual tourism product. Here, tourists do not have to pay extra cost in case they have purchased a travel program. Food tourism products have 3 states of package, combination and single. These types have a close relationship with the tourism product system in general. From playing a role both as an integral part of tourism products in general, as well as acting as an independent product, supplementing and supporting to diversify and enrich the tourism product system in general.

2.2. Food tourism resources Ben Tre

Ben Tre is one of 13 provinces in the cultural region of the southwestern region. It is a land made up of three islets (the isle of Bao, the isle of Minh, and the isle of An Hoa). This land is alluvial soil of four big rivers of the Mekong River (Tien, Ba Lai, Ham Luong, Co Chien). Besides the fertile land, Ben Tre also has a crisscrossing canal system. In addition to serving the needs of traveling, transporting goods for human life, canals also provide people with a variety of seafood.



Figure 2. A River Branch in Ben Tre province

Ben Tre has a tropical monsoon climate, with two distinct sunny and rainy seasons, with little change temperature throughout the year. With its location in the lower Mekong River, an estuary land adjacent to the sea, in the windy season, seawater often penetrates the mainland, making some areas saline. The land of Ben Tre is a large island form of alluvial deposited into "estuarine islands", one of the forms of sea encroachment in the Mekong Delta. This process of sea encroachment has formed sand dunes in Ben Tre - a very typical geomorphology of the estuary of the Mekong River.

Ben Tre is blessed by nature, with a temperate climate, cool, fresh water all year round, the fruit garden is always full of fruit, and many unique cultural values expressed in production, beliefs and customs, festival. Located in the middle of river and sea environment, influenced by tropical monsoons, the flora and fauna in Ben Tre also has the characteristics of the southwestern region. With the favorable conditions brought by nature, the residents of Ben Tre know how to take advantage of the river environment with the plentiful resources to process various dishes.



Figure 3. A Specialty Dish Made From Shrimp

A dense system of rivers and canals has provided Ben Tre with a variety of seafood. According to data of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Ben Tre province, fish is the main food with more than 120 different species, classified into groups: brackish water fish (goby, sand goby, coco goby...); group of sea fish (mackerel, herring, mackerel, tuna, squid...); group of freshwater fish

(barbonymus gonionotus, smith's barb, pristolepis fasciata, yellow catfish, catlocarpio siamensis, notopterus notopterus, carp, lates calcarifer, pangasius krempfi)...; group of fish living in the field (snake-fish, anabas, catfish...). There are more than 20 types of shrimp including marine shrimp and freshwater shrimp such as white shrimp, sugpo prawn, land shrimp, silver shrimp, giant freshwater

shrimp... In addition, there are other types of seafood such as: small crabs, crabs, frogs, eel, cockles, clams, snails... Regarding reptiles adapted to the river and water environment, they are equally diverse as: snakes, turtles, salamanders, lizards, termites, field mice, coconut mice... Insects such as:

bees, larvae of king ants - coconut weevils... With the natural ecosystem of Ben Tre, it also creates conditions for birds to grow and develop, although the quantity is not large, they are quite diverse in types: bats, storks, herons, công cộc, starlings, teal, gallicrex cinerea, calappa...



Figure 4. Live Palm Weevil Larvae – A Specialty Dish

In addition to coconut which is the main crop in Ben Tre, other crops in Ben Tre are also quite diverse, especially fruit trees: green grapefruit, durian, mangosteen, rambutan... concentrated mainly in Cho Lach, Chau Thanh. People also grow wet rice and other crops in between. The yield is not high, mainly to serve the needs of the people in the province.

Ben Tre has a humid and monsoon tropical climate, with two distinct rainy and dry seasons, so vegetables, flowers and tropical fruits here are also abundant and diverse such as: *Neptunia oleracea*, *Limnophila aromatica*, *Colocasia esculenta*, *Typha*

orientalis, *Nelumbo nucifera*, *Nymphaeaceae*, *Trapa*, *Limnocharis flava*, *Blumea lacera*... This is the type of food available in ponds, gardens and very easy to find. From familiar everyday vegetables such as: *Polygonum aviculare*, amaranth, katuk, Malabar nightshade, Gathering vegetables, broccoli... to the leaves of the tree: mango leaf, coastal premna, Ming aralia, Sour-soup creeper, young tamarind leaf...; very young leaves of the trees: shoot offset of vung...; all kind of fruit: *sonneratia caseolaris*, yong mango, young tamarind, water lily, cauliflower, turnip, gourd, pumpkin, Eggplant fruit.



Figure 5. Specialty Spring Rolls

With diversified and rich river and water resources, residents of Ben Tre took advantage of the raw materials of animals, plants, aquatic and marine products produced under the canals of the coconut forest; Combining with culinary products from coconut creates unique local dishes.

2.3. The status of exploiting tourism and single food tourism products in Ben Tre

Tourists: The Mekong Delta in general and Ben Tre in particular is one of the most important tourist centers of the country, adjacent to the southern key economic region - the most dynamically developing region in Vietnam. There are important maritime and aviation roads, so there are many advantages in attracting tourists to Ben Tre and the Mekong Delta

with the growth rate of tourists in the period 2015-2019 reaching 16, 3% per year.

The average annual number of tourists coming to Ben Tre increased, the total number of tourists in 2015 reached 1,000,000 arrivals, up 10.62%. By 2019, the total number of visitors will reach 1,882,025, an increase of 20%. Plan; Domestic visitors reached 627,106, increasing 31% over the same period, reaching 66% of the plan. And there is a slight difference in international and domestic arrivals. However, compared to the total number of tourists in the country, the Mekong River Delta has the 4th highest number of visitors in the country. Compared to the region, Ben Tre ranked 5th. Number of domestic and foreign tourists coming to Ben Tre in 10 years (2010-2019) are as follows:

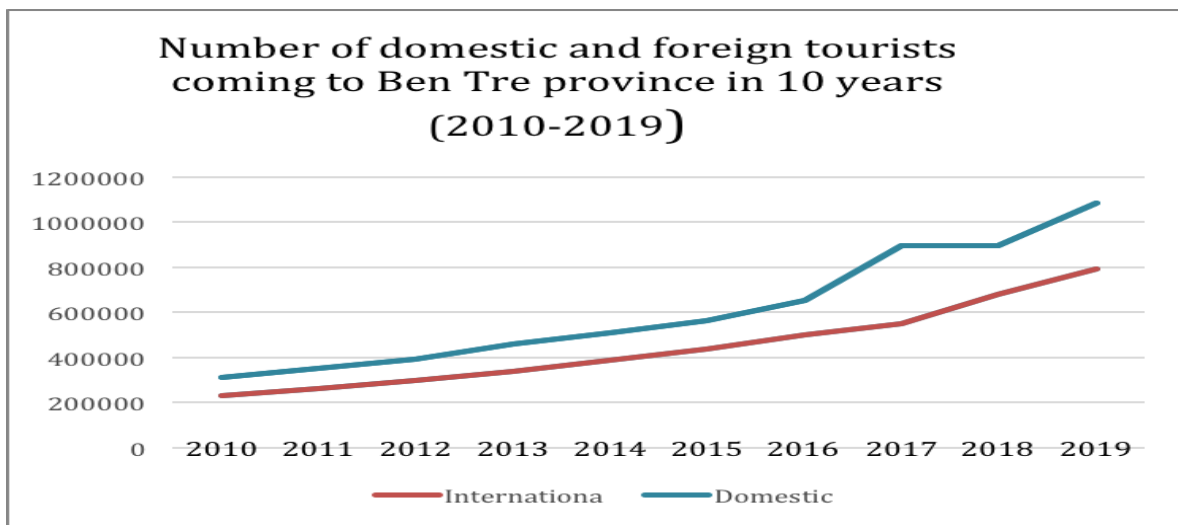


Figure 6. Number of Tourists over Years

Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Ben Tre province

Total revenue from tourists: Income from tourism is classified into two main categories: Net tourism income includes all the revenues directly collected by the tourism, such as accommodation and food income, transporting tourists, from other services... Social income from tourism, in fact, all revenues from tourists are not only collected by the tourism, but also by many other industries that engage in tourism activities. In addition, there are also a number of customer service industries that not only serve local people but also tourists such as banks, medical services, insurance...

However, in our country in general and in Ben Tre in particular, the statistical system is not yet complete, so all data on tourist expenditures are scattered, not gathered into one. That is why, according to statistics, the contribution of the tourism of Ben Tre in particular and the country in general in the economy is still low.

The revenue from tourism activities in Ben Tre province is significantly increased. In 2015, the total revenue from operating sources reached 700 billion VND, in 2016 reached 860 billion VND, and increased 23% in 2017 to 1,057 billion VND, up 23%. In 2018, the total revenue from tourism activities reached 1,329 billion VND and in 2019 reached 1,791 billion VND, up 35%. Assessment of

the increase in the income of the tourism in Ben Tre over the past time, tourism revenue is constantly increasing in both absolute value and growth rate.

The upward trend is a continuous direction. Thereby, we can see that the development of tourism income in Ben Tre is relatively stable.

Table 2: Total revenue from tourists for the period 2015-2019

Unit: Billion VND

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Revenue	440,000	860	1,057	1,329	975
% Compared with the last year	11,76%	23%	23%	26%	44%

Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Ben Tre province

Tourism technical facilities: Tourist technical facilities including accommodation, dining, sports, entertainment facilities, means of transport and other tourist facilities, it is the factor that creates the uniqueness and difference of the tourism product, creating a unique image for a hotel, a resort or a tourist destination, so it is one of the criteria for choice of visitors.

Travel business enterprises: 31 enterprises. In which, 10 international travel businesses and 11 domestic travel businesses have been licensed under the new provisions of the 2017 Law on Tourism and 01 travel agency business. Currently, 9 enterprises are adding and completing all conditions and dossiers to request the competent State agency to grant business licenses in accordance with the law.

Accommodation: In recent years, along with a significant increase in tourists, the system of accommodation, dining and entertainment establishments in Ben Tre has grown in number. Most economic sectors are involved in the accommodation and catering business. The spontaneous development and lack of planning have led to the appearance of a series of motels, guest houses and private inns. However, initially it can temporarily solve the food and drink needs of tourists, but in the long term, this will be a difficult problem to overcome. The rapid construction of accommodation establishments, especially private hotels, homestays licensed to operate tourist accommodation services has increased the total number of accommodation establishments and

rooms, creating the excess crisis during the off-season and lower the annual average occupancy in the province. Although there are many accommodation establishments, the scale is small, the quality is not high, and the additional services are poor.

Ranking and quality of accommodation, in 2010, there are 40 establishments with 698 rooms. Up to now, the province has 91 establishments with 1,590 rooms. Including 01 4-star hotel (81 rooms), 03 3-star hotels (199 rooms), 04 1-star hotels (84 rooms) and 33 homestays with a capacity of about 650 guests (including 25 qualified homestays minimum technical facilities and services for tourists and 08 homestays continue to complete the procedures, the minimum conditions for technical facilities and services to serve tourists). In addition, many other accommodation establishments such as motels and inns of fair size and quality have also developed to meet and serve the needs of tourists.

Food and drink establishments: The system of dining establishments in Ben Tre is very diverse and plentiful. Most hotels, motels, and other homes have dining facilities. Besides rich food services such as European and Asian restaurants, cafe shops, and bars, accommodation establishments also put into operation services for organizing weddings, conferences, seminar... In 2010, there were 60 food establishments, by 2015 there were 80 establishments, with a total of 19,700 seats, in 2017 developing 10 more establishments with 2,350 seats, bringing the total number of food

establishments in the province to 93 establishments. Eligible to serve tourists with 24,148 seats. In 2018, the province currently has over 114 establishments with more than 32,000 seats.

Over the years, outside hotel dining establishments have also grown rapidly, plentifully and diversified, and are always ready to serve tourists and locals. Tourists can find vegetarian restaurants, restaurants serving local specialties, restaurants serving Chinese, Japanese, and Thai dishes... serving the visitors from different countries with different tastes. In addition, the types of food establishments such as fast food restaurants, Snack Bar have started to develop to serve diverse needs.

Through the contacts, meetings and interviews with local management officials and there have been assessments on the status of exploiting local culinary culture in tourism development recently.

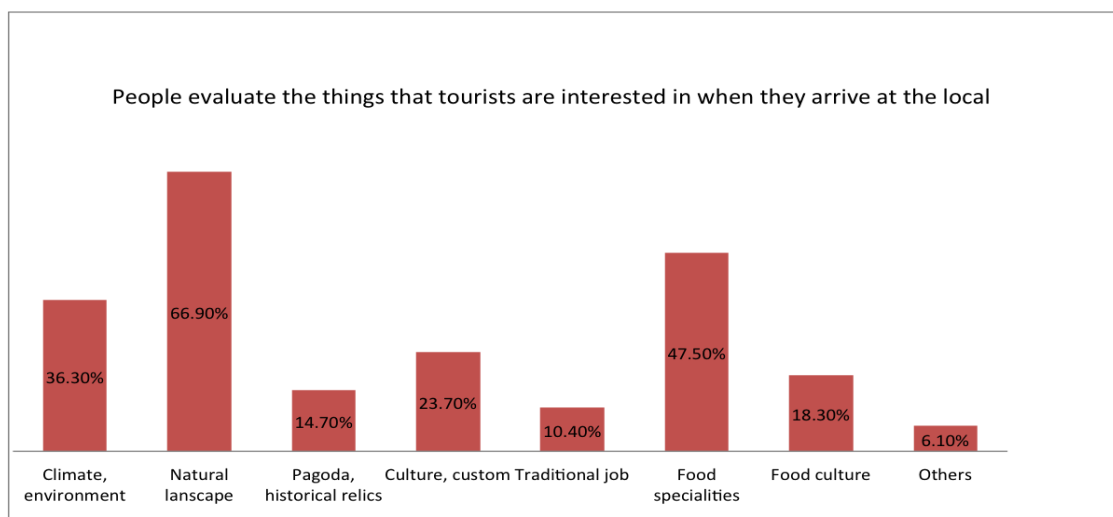
Food is interested in exploiting as a cultural element, playing an important role in promoting, propagating and introducing images of people in Ben Tre and homeland through cultural tourism events, food and coconut festival... held in the province and the country. Food culture is demonstrated through dishes and typical drinks according to the taste of the people in Ben Tre.

The locality has paid attention to the development of local cuisine, developing culinary tourism products of domestic enterprises. The locality is also being interested, many types of products with local characteristics are exploited and used to serve the needs of tourists.

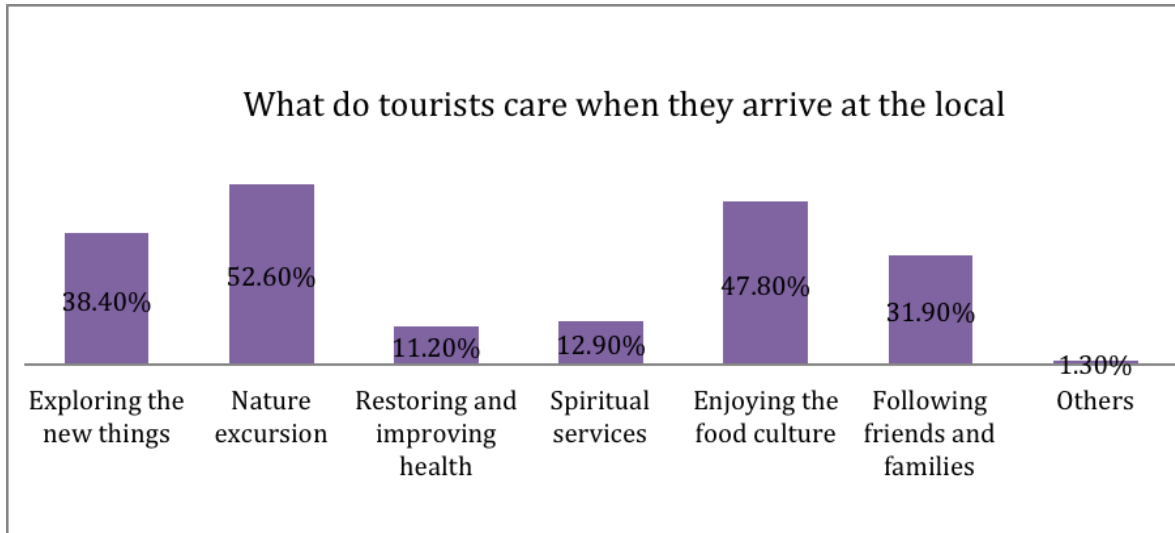
However, at present, the locality does not have detailed research on the values of culinary culture, the exploitation and promotion of culinary values is mainly purely through popular food and beverages, popularity with many people. During the implementation process, the activities of introducing pure cuisine are mainly the activities of processing and demonstration for potential tourists to enjoy, there are no propaganda activities to promote, deeply introduce dishes, drinks and local culinary culture.

Although the culinary tourism products have received attention, the nature of this product is not professional, it only supports the main tourism products, has not played a role as an important product. State management agencies have not had a specific orientation and purpose in developing this product line, the development and sale of this product is spontaneous. The society's awareness of the culinary product type is not high, and its position in the tourism product system is not appreciated.

Through the survey results, tourism businesses including representatives of travel businesses, hotels and restaurants identified that tourists to Ben Tre mainly interested in natural scenery accounting for 66.9%, specialty cuisine accounts for 47.5% and climate and environment accounting for 36.3% and this judgment is quite close to other assessments that natural excursions account for 52.6%, specialty cuisine 47, 8%, new discoveries 38.4%, shown in the following charts:



Source: The research team compiled from the survey results



Source: The research team compiled from the survey results

Figure 7. Tourists’ perceptions on Ben Tre

Through the culinary business of tourism businesses in Ben Tre, we see that tourists pay much attention to local specialties accounting for 64%, while western dishes account for 46.7%. Especially most tourists like to be served in a rustic style.

The majority of people rated tourists satisfying with the dishes serving tourists (62.70% satisfied, 28% very satisfied, 90.70% satisfied and very satisfied), as shown in the following chart:

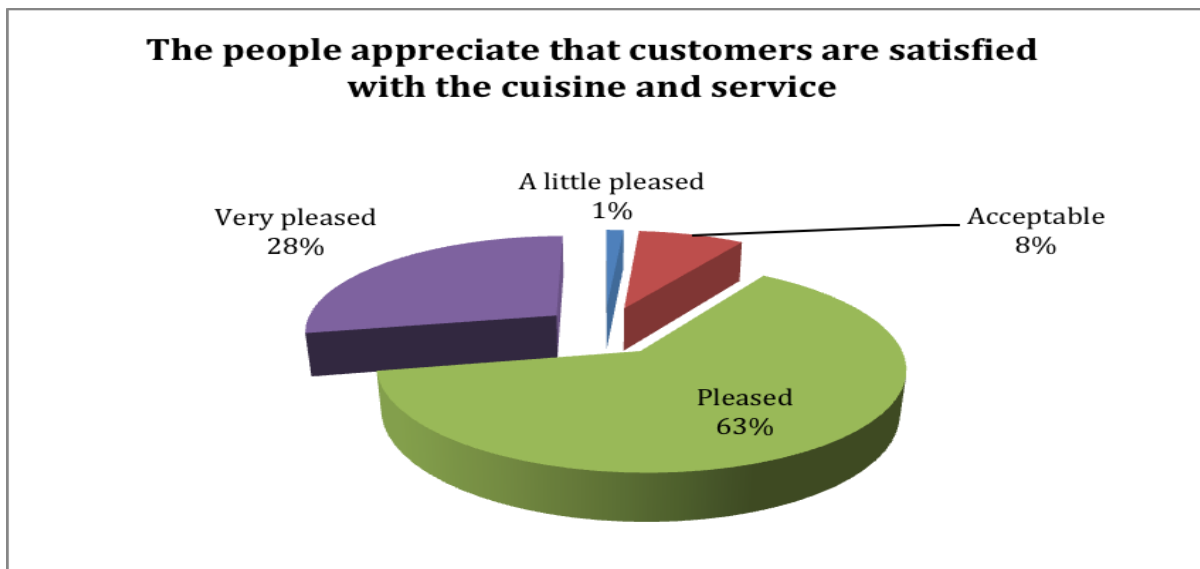


Figure 8. Tourists’ Satisfaction on Cuisine and Service

Source: The research team compiled from the survey results

People believe that Ben Tre specialties are mainly coconut dishes accounting for 51.8%, garden dishes

accounting for 17.9%, and river coastal dishes accounting for 20.8%.

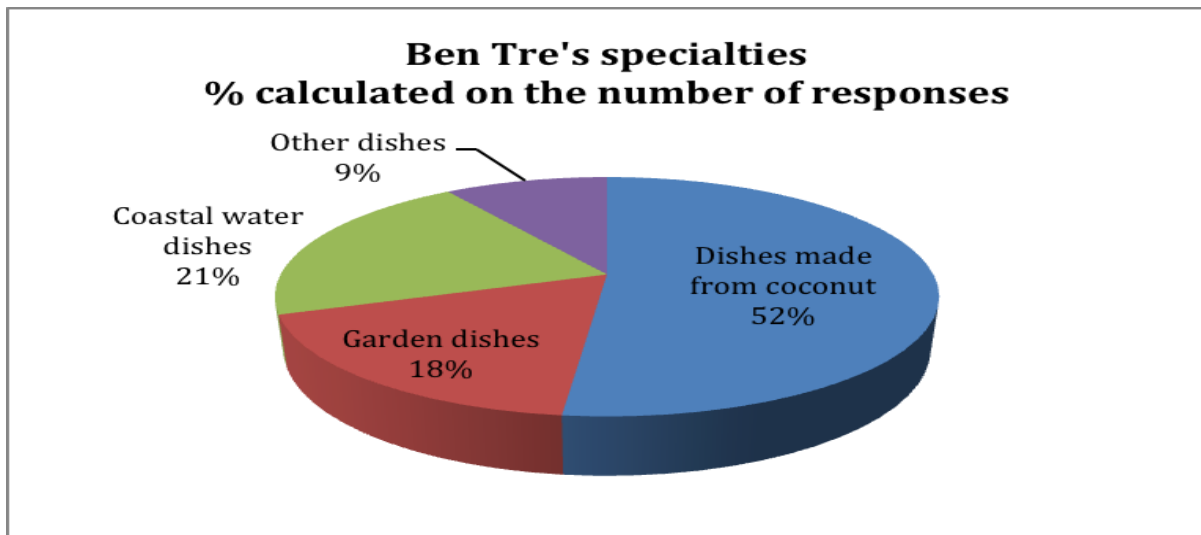


Figure 9. Tourists' Preference on culinary matters

Source: The research team compiled from the survey results

Through the survey, the majority of tourists said that the promotion and marketing of food, culinary culture as well as Ben Tre are not good, hindering the introduction of culinary culture and attracting tourists.

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

Ben Tre has a rich and diverse cuisine. It is a great potential to develop culinary tourism as well as promote the local economy, facilitate to increase value chain in agriculture, food production and processing, and preserve and promote the local culture. Food tourism not only allows visitors to enjoy unique dishes and drinks, but also provides experiences and discovers about the cultural identity and community activities of the destination associated with each dish and drink.

However, the reality shows that the exploitation of the values of local culinary culture for tourism development in general, and the development of culinary tourism products in particular is still limited, has not fully exploited its potential and rich values of culinary culture.

To exploit and develop culinary tourism well, Ben Tre needs to solve some of the following problems:

Firstly, to research and systematize the local specialties dishes and beverages in order to clearly determine their quantity, type, nature, origin, and unique value; create a database for management

agencies, businesses can exploit and use rationally and effectively culinary cultural resources for tourism development.

The construction of culinary tourism products needs to take into account the possibility of linking the model from the farm to the dining table so that tourists can have a vivid real experience. Not only stopping at providing attractive dishes, the people who work for tourism should pay attention to sharing with visitors about the dining space, or the cultural behavior while eating according to local traditions. Since then, we can take the culinary exploration journey to a new level, also to promote the beauty in local culinary culture.

Secondly, building a system and criteria for management and inspection of the network of tourist food and beverage establishments, and at the same time raising awareness of the community, social responsibility in ensuring food hygiene and safety, quality of local food. It is necessary to have solutions to raise awareness of businesses and households engaged in catering services in the exploitation and use of raw materials, spices and equipment and tools for the processing, enjoying food, drinks to ensure food hygiene and safety to serve tourists in particular and guests in general.

Thirdly, we must increase the promotion and introduce the local food culture. On the basis of reviewing and systematizing the typical dishes of

the locality, it is necessary to integrate and put into construction tourism products, the tourism of Ben Tre province. There is a campaign to widely promote local culinary culture throughout the country and the world through trade promotion activities, tourism and diplomatic events. These activities aim to honor and widely propagate the local culinary culture, shape the image of the local culinary culture through the dishes and drinks that show the characteristics of the region. At the same time, increase potential international tourists' access to local cuisine in terms of frequency, type, means and channels of access, thereby increasing tourists' awareness of the image. And brand destination. At the same time, we increase potential international tourists' access to local cuisine in terms of frequency, means and channels of access, thereby increasing travelers' awareness to the image and brand destination.

Fourthly, we must develop human resources such as a team of experts and culinary artists through preferential policies in order to promote know-how, develop, expand, dissolve in the conservation and promote local culinary cultural value. Preserving and maintaining the know-how of processing, preserving the identity of traditional culinary culture is the basis for exploiting and promoting culinary cultural values in tourism development.

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