

Gastronomy Tourism and The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Unsdgs A Thematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a dynamic form of cultural travel that offers more than just culinary experiences—it fosters deeper engagement with local traditions, economies, and identities. As the global tourism sector increasingly aligns itself with sustainable development principles, the relevance of gastronomy tourism in addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) is gaining scholarly attention. This study presents a thematic literature review of global best practices in gastronomy tourism, examining how they align with key sustainability goals such as poverty reduction, responsible consumption, gender equality, and the preservation of cultural heritage. By synthesizing findings from academic literature, international reports, and case-based insights, the paper highlights the sector's potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainable tourism development. It also identifies opportunities for policymakers, educators, and tourism planners to integrate gastronomy-focused strategies into broader sustainability frameworks. This review underscores the importance of placing food at the heart of responsible tourism and invites further research into how culinary traditions can drive inclusive and long-term development outcomes.

Keywords: Gastronomy Tourism, Sustainable Development, UNSDGs, Culinary Heritage, Responsible Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism today is no longer limited to sightseeing or leisure travel—it is increasingly intertwined with the cultural, economic, and environmental fabric of destinations. Among its many evolving segments, gastronomy tourism—also referred to as culinary tourism—has gained significant attention for its ability to blend sensory experience with cultural immersion. It represents a travel experience where food is not just a necessity but a central part of the journey, inviting tourists to engage with the heritage, traditions, and identities of a place through its cuisine. From food festivals and street markets to guided farm visits and cooking classes, gastronomy tourism offers a meaningful way to connect travellers with local ways of life.

In recent years, the global policy and academic communities have increasingly emphasized the need for tourism to contribute positively to sustainable development. This shift aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 2015, which outlines 17 Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at creating a more inclusive, equitable, and environmentally secure world. Tourism, when well-planned and responsibly managed, can be a powerful tool in realizing many of these goals—particularly those related to poverty alleviation, gender equity, decent work, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation.

Within this broader context, gastronomy tourism emerges as a unique and strategic platform that intersects with several SDGs. By promoting local food systems, supporting small-scale producers, reducing food waste, and celebrating culinary heritage, it holds immense potential to address critical sustainability challenges while also enhancing tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness.

The purpose of this study is to explore how gastronomy tourism aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through a thematic literature review of existing global practices. Rather than generating new field data, this secondary data-based inquiry synthesizes scholarly literature, policy documents, and case studies to identify how culinary tourism can be leveraged in support of sustainability. By grounding the analysis within the framework of the UNSDGs, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformative role gastronomy tourism can play in advancing global development objectives.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, secondary data-based research design, employing a thematic literature review to explore the alignment between gastronomy tourism and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Rather than conducting primary data collection, the research draws upon a wide range of secondary data sources, including journal articles from various academic data bases, policy documents, global tourism reports, and case studies from international organizations.

The review focused majorly on publications from the last 15 years (2010–2024) to ensure relevance and recency. Only English-language texts were considered. The inclusion criteria encompassed literature that;

- explicitly connects gastronomy tourism to sustainable development,
- discusses case studies from various regions, or
- offers policy insights or frameworks that reference one or more of the UNSDGs.

Studies focused solely on food production, unrelated economic analysis, or tourism segments not addressing gastronomy were excluded from the review.

A thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and frameworks within the selected literature. The analysis was conducted by coding the texts according to their alignment with specific UNSDGs—particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Additional themes such as cultural preservation, local community empowerment, and food sustainability were also mapped and synthesized to present a coherent understanding of how gastronomy tourism contributes to sustainable development.

This methodological approach enables the study to build a rich, comparative perspective on how different regions and stakeholders incorporate gastronomy tourism into their broader development agendas, grounded in the global sustainability framework.

3. GASTRONOMY TOURISM: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Definition and Scope

Gastronomy tourism, also known as food or culinary tourism, refers to travel motivated by the desire to

explore and experience local culinary traditions, dishes, and practices. It plays a significant role in shaping cultural identity, promoting regional development, and supporting local economies (Bessière, 1998). The scope includes traditional food experiences, culinary heritage, food festivals, and gastronomic branding efforts that attract diverse tourist segments seeking authentic engagement with local cultures (Nurullayev, H., 2023; Visković & Komac, 2021).

Evolution and Trends in Gastronomy Tourism

Since its emergence, gastronomy tourism has evolved from simple food tasting to a complex sector driven by experiential and emotional engagement. The progression from producer-oriented experiences (Experience 1.0) through co-creation (Experience 2.0) to foodscapes (Experience 3.0) exemplifies this shift towards more immersive and personalized experiences (Richards, G., 2021). Trends indicate increasing influence of social media and digital communication, which enhance the promotion and accessibility of local cuisines (Tkach et al., 2021; Lochman & Vágner, 2023). Moreover, the integration of sustainable practices, such as promoting vegetarian options or agroecological products, aligns gastronomy tourism with global sustainability goals (Lochman & Vágner, 2023; Thongkaw et al., 2024).

Role in Cultural Preservation and Local Identity

Gastronomy tourism significantly contributes to preserving culinary heritage and reinforcing local identities. Traditional dishes and culinary practices serve as cultural symbols and tools for community engagement and pride. For example, initiatives like the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy aim to safeguard culinary traditions and raise awareness about their cultural importance (Xie, 2021). Additionally, creative tourism involving local residents helps strengthen cultural identities by fostering authentic and sustainable tourist experiences (Leoti et al., 2023). Nevertheless, challenges such as neglect of local gastronomy in favour of built heritage or the commercialization of traditional foods can threaten cultural authenticity (Uliganets et al., 2021).

4. THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (UNSDGS) AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO TOURISM

Brief Overview of the 17 Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) are a global framework adopted in 2015 under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Comprising 17 interconnected goals and 169 targets, the SDGs are designed to address a broad range of global challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. These goals are universal, meaning they apply to all countries and stakeholders, and encourage collaborative action to create a more inclusive and sustainable world. Each goal aims to balance the three pillars of sustainable development—economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection.

The 17 goals range from eradicating hunger and poverty (SDG 1 and 2), to promoting gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable cities (SDG 11), responsible consumption (SDG 12), and climate action (SDG 13), among others. While each goal addresses specific issues, their interconnected nature means that progress in one often supports advancement in others.

Specific Goals Most Relevant to Gastronomy Tourism

Among the 17 goals, several are especially relevant to gastronomy tourism, given its direct relationship with food systems, cultural heritage, economic livelihoods, and environmental practices:

- SDG 1 (No Poverty): Gastronomy tourism can generate income and employment, especially for rural

communities, small-scale food producers, and marginalized groups, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation.

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger): By promoting local and sustainable food systems, gastronomy tourism encourages support for local agriculture, improved food security, and the preservation of traditional diets.
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Culinary tourism contributes to job creation in food services, farming, hospitality, and cultural enterprises, supporting inclusive and sustained economic growth.
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities): Gastronomy tourism reinforces local identities and cultural heritage. It fosters pride in regional cuisines, supports community-based tourism models, and can revitalize declining rural or urban areas through food-centred development.
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): Many gastronomy tourism initiatives promote sustainable eating habits, minimize food waste, and encourage low-impact food sourcing—fostering environmental stewardship in the tourism sector.
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): By supporting climate-resilient crops, reducing food miles through local sourcing, and integrating eco-conscious practices, gastronomy tourism can help mitigate its environmental footprint.

Tourism's Potential as a Tool for Achieving These Goals

Tourism, when planned and managed sustainably, has immense potential to act as a cross-cutting tool for achieving multiple SDGs. It is a major economic sector that influences employment, infrastructure, environmental policy, and cultural exchange. In the context of gastronomy tourism, this potential is particularly significant. It engages visitors with local food cultures, strengthens rural economies, and fosters mutual respect among cultures.

Tourism also provides a platform to educate travellers about sustainability, food ethics, and local livelihoods. For instance, visiting a traditional spice farm or participating in a community cooking class can build awareness around biodiversity, agricultural heritage, and fair trade. Furthermore, gastronomy tourism helps in preserving intangible cultural heritage, including cooking traditions, food rituals, and culinary storytelling, thereby aligning with UNESCO's objectives and the spirit of SDG 11.

By creating economic opportunities in off-the-beaten-path regions and encouraging more mindful consumption habits, gastronomy tourism supports the inclusive and sustainable growth of destinations. If guided by a sustainability-centred framework, it can be a powerful catalyst for systemic change in how food, people, and the planet interact through travel.

5. THEMATIC LINKAGES BETWEEN GASTRONOMY TOURISM AND THE UNSDGS

5.1. SDG 1 & 2 – No Poverty and Zero Hunger

Gastronomy tourism holds the potential to address poverty and food insecurity by creating economic opportunities for local communities and strengthening food systems. As highlighted by Thongkaw et al. (2024), investments in gastronomic sectors often lead to employment generation, improved infrastructure, and community development, particularly in rural or underserved areas. Moreover, tourism centred on traditional culinary practices supports indigenous agriculture and the conservation of local food varieties, which contributes to both food availability and dietary diversity (Pivarski et al., 2023).

5.2. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

Culinary tourism stimulates local economies by fostering small-scale enterprises and promoting entrepren-

eurship in food-related services. Uliganets et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of policy and institutional support to maintain high-quality gastronomic experiences, which in turn enhances employment prospects. By showcasing regional food cultures and encouraging demand for local services, gastronomy tourism boosts economic development, especially in areas outside mainstream tourism circuits (Visković & Komac, 2021).

5.3. SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

Food tourism plays an important role in enhancing both rural and urban sustainability through the preservation of culinary heritage and community engagement. According to Leoti et al. (2023), integrating residents in cultural tourism initiatives fosters local pride and social cohesion, while also contributing to economic resilience. Additionally, the promotion of environmentally conscious culinary trends—such as plant-based menus or zero-waste cooking—helps reduce ecological impacts in urban areas (Lochman & Vágner, 2023).

5.4. SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

Encouraging sustainable food choices is central to gastronomy tourism's alignment with SDG 12. By incorporating agroecological ingredients and emphasizing regional sourcing, culinary tourism experiences not only preserve food culture but also reduce resource consumption (Medina et al., 2023). Furthermore, digital platforms and social media are increasingly shaping consumer behaviour by raising awareness of ethical and environmentally responsible food options (Tkach et al., 2021), helping travellers make more informed and sustainable choices.

5.5. SDG 13 – Climate Action

Gastronomy tourism contributes to climate action by promoting low-impact culinary practices and advocating for sustainable food systems. As noted by Lochman and Vágner (2023), encouraging vegetarian or plant-forward diets and reducing food waste are practical strategies for lowering tourism's carbon footprint. Additionally, the emphasis on local, climate-adaptive crops supports resilience in the face of changing environmental conditions (Medina et al., 2023), making gastronomy tourism a relevant tool in climate mitigation efforts.

5.6. SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

Developing successful gastronomic tourism frameworks depends heavily on collaboration across sectors. Partnerships between government bodies, tourism organizations, local communities, and cultural institutions play a vital role in promoting culinary heritage and sustainable tourism development. For instance, initiatives endorsed by UNESCO or driven by multi-stakeholder alliances help ensure resource sharing, cultural preservation, and knowledge transfer (Xie, 2021), aligning gastronomy tourism with broader global sustainability objectives.

6. KEY GLOBAL PRACTICES AND THEIR LESSONS

Italy – Slow Food Movement and Regional Culinary Preservation

Italy has long been recognized as a pioneer in sustainable gastronomy through the global Slow Food Movement, founded in 1989. This initiative advocates for biodiversity, clean food production, and fair food economies. It emphasizes local ingredient use, seasonal food preparation, and preservation of traditional cooking methods. The movement directly supports SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities) by preserving local food cultures and supporting small-scale producers. Italian tourism integrates food festivals, wine trails, and agritourism experiences, helping visitors engage with Italy's diverse culinary landscapes sustainably.

Japan – Washoku and Culinary Heritage as UNESCO Intangible Culture

Japan's culinary tradition, Washoku, was designated a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013. Washoku emphasizes harmony with nature, seasonal food presentation, and balanced nutrition, thus aligning with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 11, and SDG 12. Japan has institutionalized culinary tourism through structured experiences such as sushi-making classes, sake tastings, and regional food heritage mapping. These activities support responsible consumption while enhancing cultural identity.

Peru – Gastronomy Branding for Economic Empowerment

Peru has successfully branded itself as a top gastronomic destination by promoting indigenous crops (like quinoa and potatoes) and traditional dishes such as ceviche. Gastronomy is integrated into national policy, enhancing Peru's global image and contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 1 (No Poverty). The "Perú Mucho Gusto" campaign and culinary schools like Le Cordon Bleu Peru train locals in culinary arts, promoting inclusive employment. These efforts have helped create a sustainable model that bridges food heritage and international tourism appeal.

Nordic Countries – Sustainable Gastronomy and the New Nordic Cuisine

Denmark, Sweden, and Norway promote New Nordic Cuisine, a movement that emphasizes organic ingredients, regional cooking methods, and eco-certification of restaurants. Restaurants like Noma in Copenhagen promote local sourcing, waste minimization, and zero-carbon food chains, aligning strongly with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 12. Government-supported food policies encourage sustainability education, green labelling, and culinary innovation that respects both environment and culture. The Nordic model is scalable and serves as a benchmark for linking gastronomy with environmental ethics.

Alignment with UNSDGs

Across these case examples, common threads emerge in how gastronomy aligns with global sustainability goals:

- Cultural Preservation (SDG 11): Through the protection and promotion of culinary heritage.
- Local Economic Development (SDG 1, SDG 8): Via job creation and support for local producers and small enterprises.
- Environmental Sustainability (SDG 12, SDG 13): Through promotion of eco-friendly practices, waste reduction, and responsible sourcing.
- Food Security and Nutrition (SDG 2, SDG 3): By advocating healthy, local diets and preserving biodiversity in food systems.

Critical Reflections on Adaptability

While these practices offer strong examples, their adaptability must consider:

- Cultural Context: Strategies like Japan's Washoku rely heavily on social norms around food etiquette, which may not translate directly into other regions.
- Infrastructure and Policy Support: Nordic countries benefit from robust institutional frameworks and public investment, which are prerequisites for replicating similar sustainability standards elsewhere.
- Community Engagement: Italy and Peru show that success depends on local producer participation and ownership, which is essential for inclusive development.

For other upcoming gastronomy tourism nations, elements such as food mapping, culinary storytelling, and farm-to-fork certification can be localized and adapted to enhance gastronomy tourism's sustainability profile.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

7.1 What Can Policymakers, Tourism Boards, Educators, and Communities Do?

Policymakers play a central role in framing supportive environments that allow gastronomy tourism to flourish sustainably. They can:

- Recognize gastronomy tourism as a strategic sector in national and regional tourism policies linked to SDG implementation.
- Provide incentives (e.g., tax benefits, microfinance schemes) for eco-friendly and community-based food ventures.
- Protect and promote culinary heritage through food mapping, GI tagging, and UNESCO nominations.
- Develop food tourism zones or clusters to highlight regional culinary strengths.
- Encourage inter-ministerial collaboration among tourism, agriculture, culture, and rural development departments.
- Support sustainable infrastructure development such as clean markets, local kitchens, and culinary museums.
- Establish regulatory standards for food hygiene, sustainability, and authenticity in culinary tourism. Tourism boards are key drivers in marketing and shaping the image of gastronomy tourism. Their actions may include:
 - Incorporating gastronomy into destination branding, highlighting regional cuisines in official tourism campaigns.
 - Organizing food festivals and culinary events that celebrate traditional dishes and engage both locals and tourists.
 - Developing thematic food trails and culinary routes that connect tourists to producers, chefs, and regional ingredients.
 - Collaborating with international platforms (e.g., UNWTO, UNESCO, Creative Cities Network) to enhance visibility.
 - Creating digital platforms and mobile apps that provide gastronomic itineraries, restaurant information, and food history.
 - Certifying local food experiences to assure quality and authenticity (e.g., eco-gastronomy labels or heritage cuisine badges).

Academic and vocational institutions are crucial for equipping the next generation of tourism professionals with relevant skills and values. They can:

- Embed gastronomy and sustainability into tourism, hospitality, and cultural studies curricula.
- Conduct interdisciplinary research on food heritage, culinary entrepreneurship, and sustainable food systems.
- Promote skill-based training in traditional cooking, food presentation, food storytelling, and culinary tourism planning.
- Facilitate collaborations with chefs, farmers, and food historians for hands-on student learning and experiential modules.
- Incorporate digital literacy for promoting local cuisines through storytelling, content creation, and online platforms.
- Establish gastronomy incubators or entrepreneurship labs to encourage food-based tourism startups.

Local communities are the heart of gastronomic heritage and must be at the centre of any sustainable tourism strategy. They can:

- Organize community-led food tours, tastings, and cooking sessions that allow tourists to engage directly with local traditions.
- Participate in co-creation of food-based experiences, ensuring authenticity and ownership.
- Establish cooperatives or collectives of small food producers, home chefs, and street vendors to ensure fair income distribution.
- Preserve and share traditional recipes and techniques, including those at risk of fading away.
- Host food storytelling and cultural exchange events, fostering pride and continuity in culinary identity.
- Promote inclusive participation of women, youth, and indigenous communities in tourism-related food ventures.

7.2 Integration of Gastronomy Tourism in National Tourism Policies and SDG Strategies

Integrating gastronomy tourism into national tourism and sustainability strategies offers countries a unique opportunity to connect cultural identity, economic development, and environmental responsibility within a unified framework. Many nations have already begun embedding culinary tourism into their broader tourism agendas, recognizing it not only as a form of cultural expression but also as a strategic pillar for sustainable development.

Governments and tourism ministries across regions are incorporating gastronomy tourism into destination branding, rural development policies, and creative economy plans. Countries like Peru, Thailand, Japan, and France have developed targeted campaigns and policy frameworks that promote regional cuisine, support local producers, and preserve intangible culinary heritage—often in partnership with international bodies like the UNESCO Creative Cities Network or the UNWTO Gastronomy Tourism Guidelines.

To ensure alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), gastronomy tourism is increasingly being linked to:

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through support for sustainable agriculture and local food systems;
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by fostering employment in culinary and food-related tourism services;
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by revitalizing urban and rural spaces through food-centred cultural activities;
- And SDG 13 (Climate Action) by promoting low-impact dining, seasonal food use, and reduction of food waste.

Furthermore, several countries have adopted multi-stakeholder approaches, engaging ministries of tourism, agriculture, culture, and environment to ensure that gastronomy tourism initiatives contribute to national SDG reporting and sustainable tourism indicators. Policy integration also includes incentives for culinary tourism SMEs, inclusion of food heritage in tourism education, and sustainability certifications for restaurants and culinary tour operators.

In summary, incorporating gastronomy tourism into national policy not only enriches the visitor experience but also reinforces national commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It provides a pathway to ensure that tourism development is inclusive, culturally respectful, and environmentally responsible.

8. CONCLUSION

This study explored the intersections between gastronomy tourism and the UNSDGs by synthesizing global best practices. Thematic analysis revealed that gastronomy tourism supports economic empowerment, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development when aligned with SDG principles. Countries like Italy, Japan, Peru, and Nordic nations offer models that integrate food culture with sustainability and tourism planning.

Gastronomy tourism has proven to be more than a leisure activity—it is a platform for resilient local economies, sustainable food systems, and intercultural understanding. Its alignment with multiple UNSDGs makes it a powerful tool for achieving long-term development goals in both developed and developing regions.

Future research and policy efforts must focus on localized adaptations of global practices, capacity-building for communities, and developing sustainability indicators specific to gastronomy tourism. The sector's future depends on collaborative governance, innovation, and commitment to inclusive sustainability.

9. LIMITATIONS

- The study relied entirely on secondary data from published literature and international reports. It did not include fieldwork or direct engagement with practitioners or tourists.
- While global practices were covered, literature availability varied across regions. Some emerging destinations had limited academic documentation on gastronomy tourism.
- Findings may be influenced by the socio-cultural contexts of the case study countries. Caution is required when applying these insights directly to other contexts without adaptation.

10. FUTURE SCOPE

- Future research can include field-based studies (interviews, focus groups, and surveys) involving chefs, local food producers, and tourists to assess on-ground sustainability impacts and stakeholder engagement.
- Comparative research between gastronomy tourism in developing and developed countries can reveal contextual differences in SDG alignment, challenges, and innovation strategies.
- There is scope to explore new areas such as Digital gastronomy tourism, Climate-smart cuisine, Post - COVID transformations in food tourism practices etc.
- Developing tools and indicators to assess how gastronomy tourism contributes to specific SDGs will enhance evidence-based policy and planning.

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