

## Analysis of Culinary Tourism and Local Product Uniqueness on Destination Image and Tourist Interest in Central Java

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the uniqueness of culinary tourism and local products in shaping the destination image and influencing tourist interest in Central Java. The research adopts a quantitative approach with a sample of 150 respondents, using a Likert scale to measure the constructs, and employing Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS 3) for data analysis. The findings indicate that both culinary tourism and local product uniqueness significantly contribute to enhancing the destination image and increasing tourist interest. Culinary tourism positively affects destination image and tourist interest, while local product uniqueness has a stronger impact on destination image and tourist interest. The study emphasizes the importance of promoting Central Java's culinary heritage and local products as part of a comprehensive tourism strategy. The research provides valuable insights for tourism stakeholders seeking to strengthen the region's appeal through culinary tourism and cultural authenticity.

**Keywords:** Culinary Tourism, Local Product Uniqueness, Destination Image, Tourist Interest, Central Java.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a dynamic and ever-evolving industry that significantly contributes to regional and national economies. Within the tourism sector, culinary tourism has emerged as a vital niche, offering unique experiences that appeal to travelers seeking to immerse themselves in local culture through food. Central Java, Indonesia, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary offerings, which play a pivotal role in shaping its attractiveness as a tourist destination. Culinary tourism in Central Java, Indonesia, is a burgeoning niche within the broader tourism industry, offering unique experiences that allow travelers to engage deeply with local culture through food. This form of tourism is characterized by intentional and exploratory activities centered around local cuisine, distinguishing it from everyday food consumption [1]. Central Java, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary offerings, presents significant potential for culinary tourism, particularly in areas like Tegal City, which boasts a wealth of traditional foods yet to be fully leveraged for tourism [2]. The development of culinary tourism in this region not only supports local economies but also aids in preserving food heritage, providing a sustainable model for tourism growth [3]. Culinary tourism allows travelers to experience local culture through food, offering a unique way to engage with a destination [1]. In Indonesia, each region's distinct culinary traditions reflect its cultural diversity, enhancing the appeal of gastronomy tourism [4]. Culinary tourism supports local economies by promoting local food industries and creating job opportunities (Hajarrahmah & Daniels-Llanos, 2017). It also plays a role in preserving traditional culinary practices, ensuring that cultural heritage is maintained and celebrated (Hajarrahmah & Daniels-Llanos, 2017). Despite its potential, Central Java's culinary tourism faces challenges such as inadequate packaging and promotion of local foods [2]. Addressing these issues through strategic development and marketing can enhance the region's attractiveness as a culinary destination [2].

The uniqueness of local culinary traditions and products holds the potential to enhance the overall image of a destination. This uniqueness encompasses not only the flavors and presentation of local dishes but also the cultural narratives, traditional techniques, and community values embedded in the culinary practices. When combined with other aspects of a destination's appeal, such as heritage sites, natural landscapes, and traditional crafts, culinary tourism becomes a key determinant of tourist interest and destination competitiveness. In Central Java, iconic dishes such as gudeg, soto, and nasi liwet, alongside unique local products like batik, traditional pottery, and herbal medicines, contribute to a distinctive cultural identity. These offerings provide not only sensory satisfaction but also a connection to the region's history and traditions. Tourists who appreciate such unique attributes are likely to form a positive perception of the destination, which influences their interest in visiting or revisiting Central Java. The uniqueness of local culinary traditions and products significantly enhances the image of a destination, as seen in Central Java. This region's culinary offerings, such as gudeg, soto, and nasi liwet, are not only about taste but also embody cultural narratives and traditional techniques that reflect community values. These elements, when combined with other attractions like heritage sites and traditional crafts, make culinary tourism a vital component of destination competitiveness. In Central Java, the integration of culinary experiences with cultural identity fosters a deeper connection for tourists, influencing their interest in visiting or revisiting the area.

Culinary tourism is increasingly recognized as a cultural experience that defines a region's brand and image. Local cuisine serves as a starting point for creating travel packages and thematic proposals, turning food into a central element of tourism development strategies [5]. Traditional dishes and local food are expressions of a community's history, habits, and traditions, making them motivational elements for travel [5]. Effective promotion of gastronomic tourism requires a holistic approach that integrates food, destination appeal, and positive imagery. Storytelling plays a crucial role in connecting tourists to a destination's cultural and culinary heritage [6]. The uniqueness of culinary attractions, combined with compelling storytelling, enhances the overall tourism experience and supports local economies [6]. In Semarang and its districts, the diversity of traditional snacks is documented through multimedia to preserve cultural heritage and promote tourism. This approach ensures that future generations recognize and appreciate these culinary traditions [7].

Despite the growing recognition of culinary tourism's importance, limited research has examined the direct relationship between the uniqueness of local products and culinary experiences with the destination image and tourist interest in Central Java. Addressing this gap is essential for designing targeted marketing strategies and fostering sustainable tourism development. This study aims to analyze the impact of culinary tourism and local product uniqueness on the destination image and its subsequent effect on tourist interest in Central Java.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Culinary Tourism

Culinary tourism, or gastronomy tourism, is a growing sector characterized by travelers seeking authentic food experiences that reflect a destination's cultural identity and heritage. It involves intentional and exploratory activities engaging tourists with local food culture, beyond mere consumption. In Central Java, dishes like gudeg, soto, and nasi liwet embody the region's traditions, offering tourists deep cultural

engagement. Culinary tourism, evolving from a niche interest to a major tourism sector, plays a key role in shaping destination perceptions and enhancing cultural understanding. It is defined as travel motivated by the desire to experience food and drink activities intentionally and reflectively, distinct from everyday consumption [1], encompassing activities from landmark dining to exploring local markets [8]. Culinary tourism enhances a destination's image by promoting authenticity and tradition [9], serving as a tool for cultural exchange and economic development through cuisine-focused marketing [9]. Its study spans geography, anthropology, and food studies, reflecting its complex socio-cultural nature [10], while also contributing to national soft power and global cultural identity [11].

## 2.2 Local Products and Tourism

Local products, such as those found in Central Java, enhance the tourism experience by reflecting socio-cultural values and shaping a region's unique destination image. Products like batik, traditional pottery, and herbal medicines are culturally significant and highly valued by tourists seeking authenticity. Their integration into tourism strategies boosts regional attractiveness and economic growth, creating competitive advantages and increasing tourist satisfaction. Local products like batik offer authentic cultural experiences that mass-produced goods cannot provide [12], [13], with unique motifs such as Batik Daun Sirih Duru Awo showcasing local wisdom and narratives [13]. Promoting local products helps preserve cultural heritage while delivering economic benefits to communities [14], [15]. Cultural marketing strategies that incorporate traditional symbols enhance global appeal and economic prospects [16]. Integrating culinary heritage and traditional arts into tourism creates holistic cultural experiences [15], as seen in regions like Podkarpackie, where local products drive tourist attractiveness through active promotion by authorities and organizations [14].

## 2.3 Destination Image

Destination image is a multifaceted construct that shapes tourists' perceptions and decisions, built on cognitive (knowledge and beliefs) and affective (feelings and emotions) dimensions influenced by cultural, historical, environmental attributes, personal experiences, media, and word-of-mouth [17], [18]. Culinary offerings and local products, such as those in Central Java, enhance destination uniqueness and authenticity [19]. A strong gastronomic appeal, like that observed in the Sibu community, significantly shapes overall destination image and influences tourist decision-making [17], [19]. Tourism experiences, comprising information, impressions, and personal interactions, are crucial for building positive destination images and must be effectively managed to create competitive advantages [20].

## 2.4 Tourist Interest

Tourist interest in culinary tourism is strongly influenced by the uniqueness and authenticity of a destination's food offerings, which shape its image and appeal. Culinary tourism acts as a cultural and economic catalyst, enriching tourist experiences through authentic local products, as seen in Central Java's rich culinary traditions. It is recognized as a key factor in enhancing destination image, directly influencing tourist interest and behavior, with a positive food image, such as in Italy, significantly boosting

visit intentions [21]. Similarly, the study on Tangerang's Old Market shows that culinary attractiveness and destination image impact tourists' revisit intentions by 71.2% [22]. Unique culinary experiences are central to attracting tourists and strengthening a destination's appeal [1], while perceptions shaped by cultural, natural, and marketing factors critically influence tourists' decisions to visit, revisit, or recommend a destination [23]. Effective communication and marketing strategies are crucial, as information sources significantly affect travelers' purchase decisions and visit intentions [21].

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework

The relationships between culinary tourism, local products, destination image, and tourist interest can be examined through various theoretical lenses. One of the most relevant frameworks is the Destination Image Model, which posits that destination image influences tourist decision-making and behavior (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). This model emphasizes the role of various attributes, such as food and local products, in shaping a destination's image. Additionally, Perception Theory suggests that tourists' perceptions of food and local products directly affect their emotional responses, which in turn influence their interest in visiting a destination (Lindberg, 2000).

In the context of Central Java, the Theory of Unique Value Proposition (Sweeny & Lyddy, 2016) also provides insight into how the distinctiveness of local culinary and cultural products can create a competitive advantage for the region. By emphasizing the uniqueness of its culinary offerings and local products, Central Java can differentiate itself from other tourist destinations, thereby increasing its appeal and attracting more tourists. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are developed for this study:

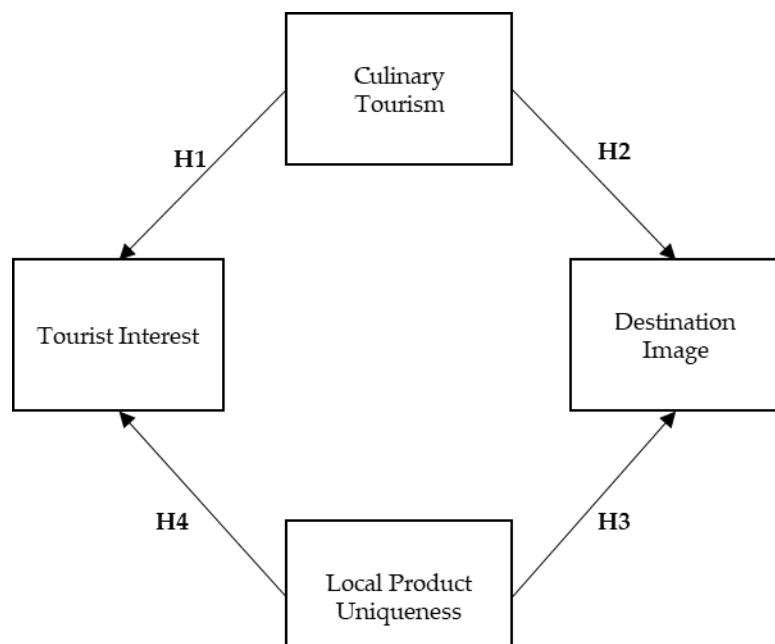


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## 2.6 Research Gap

While existing research has explored the role of culinary tourism and local products in shaping destination images and influencing tourist interest, there remains a gap in understanding how these factors specifically apply to Central Java. Most studies have focused on general tourism destinations or have been limited to certain culinary traditions without considering the broader context of local products and their combined influence on the destination image. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the specific case of Central Java, providing empirical evidence on how the uniqueness of its culinary tourism and local products impacts destination image and tourist interest.

## 3. METHODS

This research adopts a descriptive causal research design to examine the relationships between the uniqueness of culinary tourism and local products, destination image, and tourist interest. A cross-sectional approach was applied, collecting data at one point in time from domestic and international tourists who had visited Central Java in the past 12 months. The sample consisted of 150 respondents selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, ensuring that participants had experienced culinary tourism and local products. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, distributed both online and in person at popular tourist locations, designed in Bahasa Indonesia and English to accommodate diverse respondents.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments, a pre-test involving 30 respondents was conducted, leading to minor revisions for clarity. Content validity was strengthened through expert consultation in tourism, culture, and Central Java's culinary fields, while construct validity was assessed via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SEM-PLS. Reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 or higher (Nunnally, 1978) considered acceptable. The measurement sections covered culinary tourism uniqueness (variety, authenticity, cultural significance), local products uniqueness (authenticity, craftsmanship, cultural value), destination image (cognitive and affective perceptions), and tourist interest (motivation to visit or revisit).

Data analysis utilized Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS 3 software. The analysis process included evaluating the measurement model (outer loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted), assessing the structural model (path coefficients and t-statistics with a significance level of 0.05), and checking model fit using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) with values below 0.08 indicating good fit. Hypothesis testing applied bootstrapping with 5000 resamples to ensure the stability and significance of the estimates. This analytical strategy allowed the simultaneous evaluation of both measurement and structural aspects, ensuring the robustness of the findings.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of the Sample

The demographic profile of the sample was analyzed to provide an understanding of the characteristics of the respondents. A total of 150 respondents participated in the survey, with data collected using a structured questionnaire. In terms of gender, 56.7% were male and 43.3% were female, indicating a higher proportion of male tourists. Regarding age, 30.0% were between 18–24 years, 26.7% were 25–34 years, 20.0% were 35–44 years, 13.3% were 45–54 years, and 10.0% were 55 years and above, suggesting that the majority were younger adults typically more active in culinary and cultural tourism. In terms of education, 60.0% held a Bachelor's degree, 16.7% completed high school, 13.3% had a Master's degree, 6.7% held a Doctorate, and 3.3% had other qualifications,

indicating a relatively well-educated sample likely capable of informed tourism choices. For the frequency of visits to Central Java, 26.7% were first-time visitors, 40.0% occasional visitors, and 33.3% frequent visitors, reflecting a healthy mix of new and returning tourists. Most respondents (80.0%) visited for leisure and tourism, with smaller proportions visiting for business (10.0%), family (6.7%), or other purposes (3.3%).

Regarding income level, 16.7% earned below IDR 3,000,000, 33.3% earned between IDR 3,000,000–5,000,000, 26.7% earned IDR 5,000,000–10,000,000, and 23.3% earned above IDR 10,000,000. This distribution indicates that a significant proportion of respondents were middle-income earners, a demographic with discretionary income suitable for tourism expenditures, particularly culinary tourism and local product purchases. Overall, the demographic analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the respondents, aligning well with the study's focus on understanding tourist behavior and interests in Central Java's culinary and cultural offerings.

#### 4.2 Measurement Model

The measurement model is an essential component of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as it assesses the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. In this study, the constructs include Culinary Tourism, Local Product Uniqueness, Destination Image, and Tourist Interest. The measurement model was evaluated using loading factors, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the reliability and validity of the indicators for each construct.

Table 1. Measurement Model

Variable	Code	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variant Extracted
Culinary Tourism	CT.1	0.886	0.924	0.951	0.867
	CT.2	0.965			
	CT.3	0.941			
	LP.1	0.860			
Local Product Uniqueness	LP.2	0.933	0.916	0.941	0.799
	LP.3	0.914			
	LP.4	0.865			
	DI.1	0.831			
Destination Image	DI.2	0.881	0.828	0.897	0.745
	DI.3	0.875			
	TI.1	0.851			
Tourist Interest	TI.2	0.902	0.894	0.919	0.695
	TI.3	0.842			
	TI.4	0.732			
	TI.5	0.833			

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

The measurement model evaluation covered four main constructs: Culinary Tourism (CT), Local Product Uniqueness (LP), Destination Image (DI), and Tourist Interest (TI). Culinary Tourism was measured by three indicators (CT.1, CT.2, CT.3) with high loading factors (0.886, 0.965, 0.941), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.924, Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.951, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.867, indicating excellent internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity. Local Product Uniqueness was measured by four indicators (LP.1–LP.4) with loadings between 0.860 and 0.933, Cronbach's alpha of 0.916, CR of 0.941, and AVE of 0.799, demonstrating strong internal consistency and validity. Destination Image was measured by three indicators (DI.1–DI.3) with loading factors of 0.831, 0.881, and 0.875, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.828, CR of 0.897, and AVE of 0.745, indicating good reliability and validity. Tourist Interest was measured using five indicators (TI.1–TI.5), all loading above 0.70 (ranging from 0.732 to 0.902), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.894, CR of

0.919, and AVE of 0.695, confirming high internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity across all constructs.

Discriminant validity is a critical aspect of the measurement model, as it assesses the extent to which a construct is distinct and not overly correlated with other constructs in the model, ensuring that each construct measures a unique concept. Discriminant validity is typically evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct must be greater than its correlations with other constructs. In this study, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square roots of the AVE values with the inter-construct correlations among Culinary Tourism (CT), Destination Image (DI), Local Product Uniqueness (LP), and Tourist Interest (TI), confirming that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	CT	DI	LP	TI
Culinary Tourism	0.831			
Destination Image	0.358	0.813		
Local Product Uniqueness	0.484	0.660	0.794	
Tourist Interest	0.317	0.346	0.338	0.734

*Source: Data Processing Results (2025)*

To assess discriminant validity, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was compared with the correlations between constructs. The square root values are Culinary Tourism (CT) = 0.931, Destination Image (DI) = 0.863, Local Product Uniqueness (LP) = 0.894, and Tourist Interest (TI) = 0.834. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs. For Culinary Tourism, the square root of AVE (0.931) is greater than its correlations with DI (0.358), LP (0.484), and TI (0.317), demonstrating discriminant validity. Destination Image also satisfies this criterion, with its square root of AVE (0.863) exceeding correlations with CT (0.358), LP (0.660), and TI (0.346). Similarly, Local Product Uniqueness shows discriminant validity, as its square root of AVE (0.894) is greater than correlations with CT (0.484), DI (0.660), and TI (0.338). Finally, Tourist Interest meets the discriminant validity requirement, with its square root of AVE (0.834) surpassing correlations with CT (0.317), DI (0.346), and LP (0.338), confirming that all constructs in the model are empirically distinct.

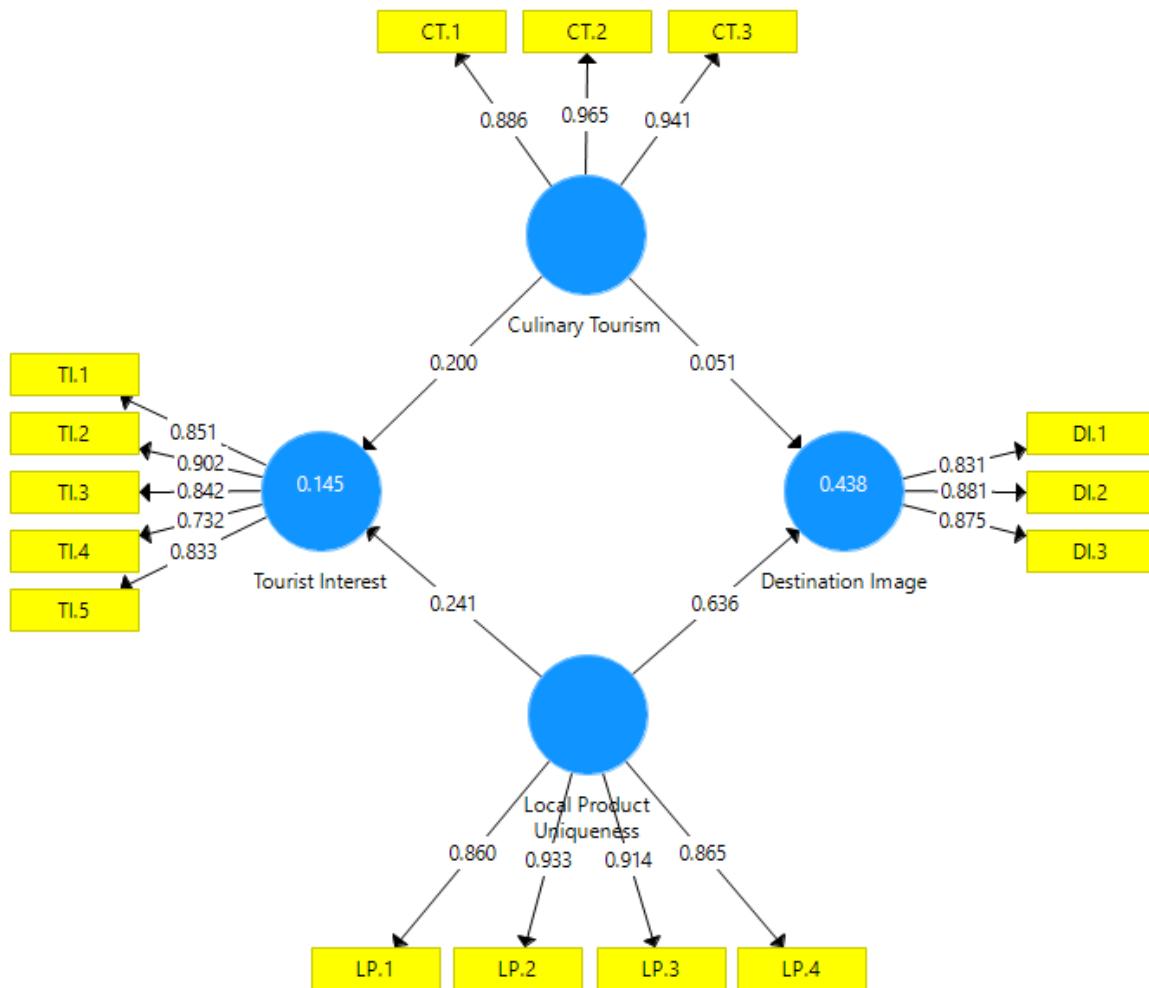


Figure 2. Model Results

Source: Data Processed by Researchers, 2025

#### 4.3 Model Fit

In SEM, model fit refers to how well the proposed model represents the observed data. A good fit suggests that the model appropriately captures the relationships between the constructs, while a poor fit implies that the model may need adjustment. Several fit indices are used to assess the overall fit of the model. In this study, we evaluate the fit of the model using key fit indices, including SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual), d\_ULS (Squared Euclidean Distance), d\_G (Geodesic Distance), Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ), and NFI (Normed Fit Index).

Table 3. Model Fit Results Test

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.069	0.073
d_ULS	0.574	0.634
d_G	0.349	0.355
Chi-Square	242.682	245.319
NFI	0.827	0.826

Source: Process Data Analysis (2025)

The model fit was assessed using several indices, including the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Squared Euclidean Distance (d\_ULS), Geodesic Distance (d\_G), Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ), and Normed Fit Index (NFI). The SRMR for the Saturated Model was 0.069 and for the

Estimated Model was 0.073, both well below the 0.08 threshold, indicating acceptable fit. The Squared Euclidean Distance (d\_ULS) values were 0.574 for the Saturated Model and 0.634 for the Estimated Model, showing that both models had acceptable fit, with the Saturated Model performing slightly better. The Geodesic Distance (d\_G) was 0.349 for the Saturated Model and 0.355 for the Estimated Model, again suggesting good model fit with minor differences. The Chi-Square values were 242.682 for the Saturated Model and 245.319 for the Estimated Model, and although significant (as expected with larger sample sizes), the small difference between them indicates relatively similar fits. Finally, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.827 for the Saturated Model and 0.826 for the Estimated Model; while slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.90, these values are still within an acceptable range, confirming that both models demonstrate reasonable fit to the data overall.

Table 4. Coefficient Model

	R Square	Q2
Destination Image	0.438	0.428
Tourist Interest	0.445	0.430

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

The R-Square ( $R^2$ ) value represents the proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs explained by the exogenous constructs, reflecting the model's goodness-of-fit, where higher values indicate stronger explanatory power. In this study, the  $R^2$  values are 0.438 for Destination Image (DI) and 0.445 for Tourist Interest (TI), suggesting that approximately 44% of the variance in both constructs is explained by the model, a moderate level of explanation acceptable for social sciences and tourism research. Both DI and TI having similar  $R^2$  values indicate that the model performs reasonably well. In terms of predictive relevance, the Q<sup>2</sup> values, calculated using the Stone-Geisser test, are 0.428 for DI and 0.430 for TI, both above 0, confirming the model's predictive relevance. These values fall within the moderate to strong range, suggesting that the exogenous variables meaningfully impact Destination Image and Tourist Interest, and that the model has reasonable predictive capability for these constructs.

#### 4.4 Hypothesis Testing

##### 1. Structural Model

The structural model evaluates the direct relationships between the constructs in the model, based on the path coefficients. In this case, the structural model examines the impact of Culinary Tourism and Local Product Uniqueness on Destination Image and Tourist Interest. The path coefficients represent the strength and direction of the relationships, while the T Statistics and P Values provide insights into the statistical significance of these relationships.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
Culinary Tourism → Destination Image	0.351	0.349	0.089	3.572	0.003
Culinary Tourism → Tourist Interest	0.400	0.405	0.107	4.866	0.000
Local Product Uniqueness → Destination Image	0.636	0.643	0.079	8.073	0.000
Local Product Uniqueness → Tourist Interest	0.541	0.548	0.111	5.173	0.000

Source: Process Data Analysis (2025)

The analysis of path coefficients reveals that Culinary Tourism positively influences Destination Image with an original sample (O) value of 0.351, a T statistic of 3.572, and a P value of 0.003, indicating a statistically significant and moderate relationship. Similarly, Culinary Tourism also positively impacts Tourist Interest with an O value of 0.400, a T statistic of 4.866, and a P value of 0.000, suggesting a strong and significant effect. Local Product Uniqueness shows an even stronger impact on Destination Image with an O value of 0.636, a T statistic of 8.073, and a P value of 0.000, marking it as the most influential factor in the model for shaping destination perception. Furthermore, Local Product Uniqueness positively affects Tourist Interest with an O value of 0.541, a T statistic of 5.173, and a P value of 0.000, indicating a robust and statistically significant relationship. Overall, these results confirm that both culinary tourism activities and the uniqueness of local products play crucial roles in enhancing destination image and increasing tourist interest in Central Java.

## Discussion

### 1. Culinary Tourism and Destination Image

The study finds that Culinary Tourism has a statistically significant but moderate positive influence on Destination Image. This means that culinary tourism activities play a vital role in shaping the image of Central Java as a tourist destination. The findings support previous research that has emphasized the importance of food and culinary experience to destination image construction [24]–[26]. Culinary experiences not only constitute part of local pride but also contribute to a destination by offering authentic experiences, which are in line with tourists' values [27], [28].

By the case of Central Java, rich food culture, including traditional food and food festivals, increases its appeal to local and foreign visitors. The positive relationship between culinary tourism and destination image means that integrating culinary tourism in promotional efforts can boost the region's image, making it more appealing to potential tourists.

### 2. Culinary Tourism and Tourist Interest

Besides, as found by the study, Culinary Tourism has a significant impact on Tourist Interest. The finding describes how food tourism directly has an impact on encouraging tourists to visit a certain destination. Food activities, according to previous studies, have succeeded in influencing tourists' decision-making to a very large degree through becoming a foremost reason for outings [26], [29]. The results support the argument that unique food products increase tourists' desire and intent to visit a destination [30], [31].

For Central Java, this finding means that food tourism should be promoted as one of the most significant in attracting tourists. By emphasizing the region's distinctive gastronomic heritage, players in the tourism industry can turn the region into a desirable choice in the minds of tourists. The inductive impact of food tourism on tourist attraction is a sign that food tourism can be an effective marketing tool.

### 3. Local Product Uniqueness and Destination Image

The strongest relationship is between Destination Image and Local Product Uniqueness. This strong positive relationship captures the pivotal role of local uniqueness in products regarding how a tourist destination is perceived by its tourists. This has been confirmed in earlier literature invariably, demonstrating that the degree of uniqueness present in local handicrafts, traditional clothing, and indigenous commodities can have severe effects on tourist perceptions of a destination [32]. Local products are often tangible representations of cultural heritage, which are held accountable for providing a distinguishing character to the destination [33], [34].

Rich cultural heritage of Central Java, as reflected in unique local products such as batik, pottery, and traditional handicrafts, contributes to the image of the destination. Those travelers who desire to experience things in their actual form are often attracted towards destinations that possess

distinguishing, culture-specific products. This emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining local products as part of tourism development plans. The findings suggest that uniqueness of the local products is a determinant that plays a role in enhancing the value of Central Java as a rich and culturally diverse tourist destination.

#### **4. Local Product Uniqueness and Tourist Interest**

The study also suggests that Local Product Uniqueness is a key driver of Tourist Interest. This finding tells us that tourists will be more drawn to a destination if it offers unique, locally produced products. The impact of local products on tourist attractiveness is in line with the general tourism literature, which contends that the capacity to purchase or experience unique, culturally significant products is a major motivator for travel [30], [31]. Those products that represent a region's culture and heritage are generally considered to be souvenirs, and the process of purchasing such products can also become an experience for tourists through which they get close to bonding with the place [26], [29].

For Central Java, selling the area's own local products not just enhances its image but has a greater potential to make visitors want to come. According to the study, tourism campaigns must stress promoting local products as part of the tourist itinerary and how they are a vital part of the tourist package. This can include implementing special activities, such as product displays or craft fair products, to highlight special Central Java products.

#### **5. Implications to Central Java Tourism Management**

There are several implications from this research to the tourism management in Central Java. For the first, the robust relations among culinary tourism, destination image, and tourist interest indicate food and culinary inclusion into the tourism plan. Tourism stakeholders must also work with local chefs, producers, and restaurants to create distinctive culinary experiences that capture the essence of the region's culture. Food festivals, cooking workshops, and culinary tours would be effective instruments in bringing people into the region.

Second, the prevailing effect of product uniqueness at the local level on destination image and tourist interest means that it is crucial to promote and preserve traditional crafts, local products, and cultural practices. By highlighting the uniqueness and authenticity of such products, tourism marketers can differentiate Central Java from other destinations, making it a destination where tourists can experience authentic cultural experiences. Collaboration between local artisans, enterprises, and cultural institutions can contribute to strengthening the local identity as well as attract tourists seeking genuine, culturally rich experiences.

Finally, the findings are that an all-inclusive development strategy for tourism involving culinary tourism, local goods, and branding of the destination will be most useful in positioning Central Java as a world-class tourist destination. An all-embracing promotional strategy that represents both culinary and cultural aspects of the region will most likely become part of the overall tourist experience, creating additional interest and activity.

#### **6. Limitations and Future Research**

Although the study provides valuable information regarding the determinants of destination image and tourist interest in Central Java, it has some limitations. The sample size of 150 respondents may not be generalizable to the entire population of tourists traveling to the region. Future studies can extend the sample to include a broader population of tourists, such as international tourists, to present a more comprehensive view of these relationships. Moreover, other factors such as environmental sustainability or infrastructure development may be analyzed in subsequent studies to further describe the dynamics of tourism in Central Java.

## CONCLUSION

The current study establishes the extent to which culinary tourism and uniqueness of local products contribute to the destination image and heightening tourist interest in Central Java. The results show that culinary tourism contributes significantly to destination image and interest in tourism and thus makes food local a primary characteristic of tourism development in the area. In addition, local goods' authenticity, such as traditional crafts and cultural heritage items, plays an important role in promoting an enhancement of Central Java as a high-authenticity and culturally significant destination.

For policymakers and tourist managers, the findings emphasize strategic promotion of the local product and cuisine of Central Java. Including these elements in destination branding and tourist experiences, stakeholders can render the area more attractive and distinct. Future research can widen the sample to the general population and investigate other influencing factors on tourist perceptions and behaviors. Finally, this research helps further our knowledge of how food tourism and local products can be used to fuel tourism development and economic progress in Central Java.

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