

Research article

Sustainability, ethics, and cultural authenticity: determinants of tourist satisfaction with street food at religious destinations

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the impact of street food vendors in religious destinations on tourists' food experiences and satisfaction. It further examined whether the sustainable practices employed by these vendors enhance tourists' memorable food experiences and satisfaction, with particular attention to the moderating effects of the vendors' sustainable and ethical practices, as well as their religious and cultural values. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire administered to 358 tourists who consumed local street food during their visit to Varanasi. The data were analysed using Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) to evaluate the direct impact of sustainable practices, ethical practices, and religious-cultural values on tourists' food experiences. The findings reveal that the sustainable practices, ethical behaviour, and cultural and religious values of street food vendors significantly influenced tourists' culinary experiences. Among these factors, sustainable practices exerted the most substantial positive impact, followed by ethical practices, and subsequently, cultural and religious values. The study concludes that tourists consider vendors' behaviour and values conveyed through food, and experiences can be enhanced through eco-friendly actions and ethical behavior.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable practices;
ethical practices; street food;
tourist satisfaction;
memorable experience

Introduction

Travel is enhanced by food and beverage culture, which encourage travelers (Ozcelik & Akova, 2021). A significant component of the tourist schedule is the meal selection made by the travelers both at the destination and throughout the tour (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As a representation of the local gastronomic heritage, street foods are typically made and served on the streets (FAO, 2023). Despite its substantial economic contribution and ability to foster local community development by creating job possibilities, street food is rarely considered in many areas. Insight into culinary heritage and a source of income for local communities, street foods offer a distinctive aspect of the urban experience. In addition to meeting the dietary requirements of religious pilgrims, street food in a place of worship serves as a representation of the customs and values of the area (Henderson, 2014). Religion has a significant impact on local culinary customs. A region's religious eating customs reflect its religious values, which are embodied in its symbols and essence. One important factor influencing food consumption and choice is the religious setting (Khan, 1981). Street food has been described as a source of inexpensive meals that help tourists develop memories and identities, as more travellers choose authentic cuisine and a sustainable travel experience (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016). According to Jeaheng and Han (2020), street food is a representation of local cuisine. Visitors believe that local cuisine is more wholesome and nourishing, which results in sumptuous meals and the desire to return to the location (Cifci et al., 2022). Since minimal food miles are important for food consumption, street food is seen as sustainable, safe, and healthy (Bayraktar et al., 2024). The significance of religious feelings is reflected in the food offered in places of worship, which is frequently associated with dietary restrictions and ceremonies. According to academics Kivela and Crofts (2006), the relationship between food and eating habits is important since it influences visitors' experiences at a place and makes them want to return to sample the local specialties. Previous research has indicated that academicians are

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HOW TO CITE: Seal, P.P., Bakshi, I. & Yadav, N. (2026). Sustainability, ethics, and cultural authenticity: Determinants of tourist satisfaction with street food at religious destinations. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 15(1), 47-56. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.716>

ISSN: 2223-814X (Online) | © 2026 AJHTL



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becoming more interested in eating local food (Rehman et al., 2022). In this setting, street food plays an important function as a component of local cuisine (Pham et al., 2023). Street food may draw a memorable experience for visitors, but there haven't been many studies that take this viewpoint into account (Cifci et al., 2022). There has been a rise in tourists' interest in street food, with a preference for regional cuisine (Pham et al., 2023). One of the world's oldest surviving cities is Varanasi, also called Benaras (Kashi) (Gogate, 2023). The city of traditional classical culture, sanctified by religion and exalted by myth and legend, Varanasi is the microcosm of Hinduism and has long drawn plenty of pilgrims and devotees. By considering sustainability, ethical standards, spirituality in religious locations, and unforgettable culinary experiences, the research study seeks to close the gap in the evaluation of street food from the viewpoint of tourists.

Literature review

Food experience and satisfaction

The experiential quality of street food for international tourists, focusing on outcome food quality and the physical environment, its effect on life satisfaction was studied with the help of a structural equation model, which concluded that quality has a considerable influence on destination image and life satisfaction (Lee et al., 2020) and, food service quality in a culinary destination refers to the standard or standard maintained when offering guests food service experiences. It also encompasses a variety of aspects of the visitor experience, including interactions with food staff, the overall atmosphere of the food outlet, and its facilities (Oloso et al., 2024). However, Food servicescape generally entails the design and creation of service spaces where service-providers meet with consumers to perform desired services for the purpose of ensuring service consumers' satisfaction. It consists of physical and perceptible impulses that can affect and shape customers' emotions and general interactions with the service provider (Eka et al., 2024). Consumer happiness and loyalty are increased when restaurant image and perceived value are positively impacted by food quality, service quality, and the physical environment, according to an analysis of consumer surveys on gastronomic experience (Cankül et al., 2024). Food satisfaction refers to the joy or contentment guests experience when food or service aligns with their needs and expectations (Dianawati et al., 2024). Lai (2020) investigated how tourists' word-of-mouth (WOM) about Portuguese meals in Macau was affected by integrated satisfaction. The study found that WOM and food type satisfaction are mediated by integrated satisfaction. Street snacks produced the highest word-of-mouth (WOM), despite Michelin meals having the biggest impact on overall satisfaction. This shows that both high-quality and culturally unique foods increase visitor contentment and advocacy. A research study on Portuguese foods in Macau investigated the impact of integrated satisfaction on tourists' word of mouth (WOM), which stated that integrated satisfaction does serve as a mediator between food type satisfaction and WOM. Although Michelin food had the overall greatest satisfaction, the street food generated the most WOM (Lai, 2020).

Sustainable practices

Packaging-free products enhance brand image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Barbosa et al., 2023). Adopting sustainable practices enhances consumer perceptions and strengthens brand relationships. Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC) are characterised by minimal intermediaries between producers and consumers, which will help reduce food miles, carbon emissions, and packaging waste. The review on sustainable food demonstrates that participatory and inclusive governance is essential for addressing the dimension of food sustainability (Donner et al., 2024). The key strategies include multi-stakeholder collaboration and adaptive frameworks, which support local innovation while aligning with global objectives. Surveys and focus groups identify key barriers like overconsumption, misunderstanding of date labels, and limited access to waste disposal options. The study advocates for policy reform, public education, and infrastructure enhancements. The triple bottom line approach of sustainability integrates profit, people, and planet. The wine industry highlights an emphasis on social sustainability, which includes workplace safety and environmental care. According to APHA (2007), there is a clear correlation between food and sustainable development and health. Urbanization, affluence, changes in lifestyle, and cultural values all have an impact on the way people eat (WBCSD, 2008). This move toward a high-animal-product consumption pattern also raises the need for water (Renault & Wallender, 2000). Since livestock farming necessitates a large amount of land, an expansion in animal-based production calls for more resources and land (Gerbens-Leenes & Nonhebel, 2005). Compared to fruits and vegetables, red meat has the largest environmental impact (Duchin, 2005). A shift to a more resource-efficient and healthful diet high in vegetables is necessary, considering the detrimental effects excessive animal production has on the environment and resources (Vanham & Bidoglio, 2013).

Ethical practices

An expert in food safety, nutrition, and processing collaborates with stakeholders such as consumers, companies, authorities, and researchers to ensure food safety. Food companies and safety authorities share the responsibility of preventing health issues within the food chain, although research priorities differ. Companies focus on developing efficient hazard control methods that are cost-effective and easy to implement, whereas authorities concentrate on identifying unforeseen hazards. The food industry addresses sustainability concerns, which

encompass both workers' conditions and product safety, as well as the environmental impact of soil erosion and chemical use (Pullman et al., 2009). Ethical street food vending requires a balance between cultural authenticity and public health. Past studies state that street food vendors operate in risky legal and economic conditions, lacking access to sanitation or food safety training, which may pose health risks for the consumers (Tinker, 1997; FAO, 2007). Ethical street food may help in promoting environmental sustainability by reducing waste and procuring sustainably. Despite these challenges, street food can incorporate ethics if it supports inclusive policies and governance (Brown et al., 2019). Ethics in street food do necessitate a combined approach of consumer safety along with vendor pride and empowerment. Considering the concerns stated, the street food could evolve as a sustainable source for urban food needs. The study also looks into ethical practices by street food vendors at a religious destination.

Spirituality and religion

Studies have demonstrated how religious communities in the diaspora preserve their heritage while integrating into the host culture. The researchers (Tari et al., 2025) emphasise how technology has influenced religious ideas and rituals. Studies have also stated that religious discrimination does impact mental health, which leads to stress, anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. As food is an integral part of any individual's daily life, and for humans, food is compelling considering the biological and social aspects of commensality (Chrzan, 2013). Food is attributed to religion and spirituality, and is said to be a "lived religion". Spirituality in food is not just based on ideas or ideals but on the lived practicality, which is related to food (Salonen, 2018). Spirituality has been suggested to provide a great deal of benefits, including health assistance, work environment, and individual wellbeing (Czekóová et al., 2018). Although the interest in spirituality is still young and evolving, the research studies on food and spirituality are rare (Michopoulou & Jauniškis, 2020). The current study discusses how spirituality and food are linked in a religious destination.

Memorable food experience

Visual presentation and dining settings do influence the initial perceptions and enjoyment (Kovalenko et al., 2023). Food plating elements like colour, restaurant aesthetics elevate perceived quality even before they have tasted the food. For tourists, the interaction with locals and the hospitality experienced while dining increases their memorability and offers engagement with local culture. New recipes, ingredients, and dining concepts provide travellers with a memorable experience as they seek unique encounters (Kaneko et al., 2020). Researchers state that slow food restaurants offer an unforgettable experience through high-quality local culinary approaches that challenge the fast pace of modern life. Food also triggers cognitive, emotional, and physical responses (Kim et al., 2022). Memories tied to childhood do provide significant life events, which enhance the food experiences. Past research study highlights a strong relationship between memorable food experiences and tourist satisfaction. Culinary meetings significantly enhance a visitor's enjoyment of their trip (Pokhrel, 2024). Past literature illustrates how memorable food experiences contribute to destination image, satisfaction, loyalty, and responsible tourism behaviour (Boontos & Uon, 2025). Studies do confirm that a memorable food experience is shaped by sensory, service, and environmental factors. Research studies do state that memorable culinary experiences impact tourism satisfaction, which acts as a mediator between the experience and the intention to revisit. The satisfied tourists provide positive feedback, recommend the destination, and return (Tešin et al., 2023). Memorable food experiences represent cultural immersion, as tourists engage with local culture through new recipes, meeting locals, and visiting places that have strong culinary identities, serving as a "window to the culture of the destination" (Wang et al., 2025).

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to investigate the various dimensions through which street food vendors in Varanasi influenced tourists' food experiences and satisfaction. Firstly, it examined whether the sustainable practices adopted by street food vendors positively enhanced tourists' food experiences, while testing the null hypothesis that such practices did not have a significant positive influence on their experiences. Secondly, the study analysed the ethical practices followed by street food vendors, exploring their role in enhancing tourists' food experiences, and correspondingly tested the null hypothesis that these ethical practices had no significant positive effect. Thirdly, it explored the influence of vendors' religious beliefs and cultural values on the tourists' experiences, while testing the null hypothesis that these cultural and spiritual elements did not significantly contribute to the food experience. Lastly, the study analysed the impact of memorable food experiences on overall tourist satisfaction, with a focus on whether this relationship was significantly moderated by the vendors' sustainable and ethical practices and their religious and cultural values. The study was guided by a set of clearly defined null hypotheses to assess the influence of various vendor-related factors on tourists' food experiences and satisfaction in Varanasi.

H₀₁ - Sustainable practices adopted by street food vendors did not have a significant positive influence on tourists' food experiences.

H₀₂ - The ethical practices followed by vendors did not significantly enhance tourists' food experiences.

H₀₃ - The religious beliefs and cultural values of the vendors did not have a significant positive impact on tourists' culinary experiences.

H_{0a}- Memorable food experiences did not significantly impact overall tourist satisfaction.

H_{0b}- The relationship between memorable food experiences and tourist satisfaction was not significantly moderated by the vendors' sustainable and ethical practices, nor by their religious beliefs and cultural values.

These null hypotheses provided a structured framework for testing the relationships between street food vendors' practices, tourist experiences, and satisfaction within the street food culture of Varanasi.

Research methods

The study used a quantitative methodology to examine how tourists' culinary experiences in Varanasi are impacted by ethical and sustainable street food practices, as well as religious convictions and cultural values. The main tool used to collect data was a structured questionnaire. 358 visitors who had eaten local street cuisine while in Varanasi made up the sample. Due to practical constraints in accessing a large and diverse population, convenience sampling was employed. Tourists were approached at various public venues, including popular food markets, local eateries, cultural and religious sites, and sightseeing locations throughout the city. The questionnaire incorporated both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions aimed at assessing tourists' perceptions of street food vendors' sustainability and ethical practices, their religious and cultural expressions, the overall food experience, and tourist satisfaction. To make sure the questionnaire was reliable and clear, a pilot study was carried out with a small sample prior to the main data collection. Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was used for data analysis to evaluate the direct impact of ethical, sustainable, and religious-cultural practices on the culinary experiences of tourists. Furthermore, the study employed Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) to examine if the ethical and sustainable practices of street food vendors, as well as their cultural values and religious beliefs, influenced the association between tourist pleasure and memorable meal experiences. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. The methodology ensured data collection from a diverse group of tourists to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and opinions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between food practices and tourist experiences in the spiritually and culturally rich context of Varanasi.

Data analysis and results

The goal of the current study was to find out how tourists' culinary experiences were affected by ethical and sustainable practices, as well as the cultural and religious beliefs of Varanasi's street food vendors. It also sought to evaluate the impact of these noteworthy culinary encounters on overall visitor satisfaction. Several multiple regression analyses were carried out in order to accomplish these goals and evaluate the associated null hypotheses. To assess the impact of sustainable methods used by street food sellers on visitors' culinary experiences, a multiple linear regression analysis was first conducted.

Table 1: Regression model summary of sustainable practices adopted by street food vendors in Varanasi and tourists' food experiences

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
		.842	.709	.697	.28636	2.131
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p
I	(Constant)	-.463	.179		-2.59	.010
	Vendors use eco-friendly, biodegradable packaging for food items.	.088	.030	.112	2.98	.003
	Vendors segregate waste into recyclables and non-recyclables to reduce environmental impact.	.050	.027	.060	1.83	.067
	Vendors encourage customers to bring their own containers or reuse containers for take-away orders.	.090	.025	.118	3.58	.000
	Vendors use energy-efficient cooking methods, such as gas stoves or solar-powered equipment.	.046	.026	.060	1.77	.076
	Vendors source ingredients locally to reduce transportation-related carbon footprints.	.099	.025	.134	3.95	.000
	Vendors make efforts to minimize plastic usage by avoiding plastic straws, bags, and cutlery.	.047	.031	.055	1.52	.129
	Vendors compost food scraps instead of disposing of them in landfills.	.106	.027	.146	3.94	.000
	Vendors implement practices to conserve water, such as using water-efficient cleaning methods.	.089	.027	.116	3.27	.001
	Vendors provide plant-based food options to reduce the environmental impact associated with animal farming.	.077	.027	.104	2.89	.004
	Vendors use organic ingredients that are grown without harmful pesticides or chemicals.	.094	.026	.121	3.55	.000
	Vendors ensure waste is disposed of properly, following local waste management practices.	.066	.030	.081	2.19	.029
	Vendors use solar panels or other sustainable energy sources when possible.	.089	.027	.116	3.23	.001

	Vendors minimize food waste by accurately forecasting demand and reusing leftovers.	.060	.027	.075	2.22	.027
	Vendors opt for environmentally safe cleaning products for their stalls and cooking areas.	.123	.029	.148	4.26	.000
	Vendors use energy-efficient LED lighting for their stalls to reduce electricity consumption.	-.013	.027	-.016	-.477	.634
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	68.461	15	4.564	55.659	.000
	Residual	28.044	342	.082		
	Total	96.506	357			

The results of the test applied (Table 1) revealed a high degree of correlation, with an R-value of 0.842 and an R² of 0.709, indicating that approximately 71% of the variance in tourists’ food experiences could be attributed to sustainable practices implemented by the vendors. The adjusted R² of 0.697 demonstrated a strong explanatory power of the model, while the Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.131 confirmed the absence of autocorrelation, reinforcing the reliability of the results. The ANOVA test further validated the model’s statistical significance (F = 55.659, p < .001). Among the individual sustainable practices assessed, several were found to significantly enhance tourists’ food experiences. These included the use of eco-friendly packaging ($\beta = .112, p = .003$), encouragement of reusable containers ($\beta = .118, p < .001$), sourcing ingredients locally ($\beta = .134, p < .001$), composting food waste ($\beta = .146, p < .001$), water conservation efforts ($\beta = .116, p = .001$), and the incorporation of organic ingredients ($\beta = .121, p < .001$). In contrast, practices such as the use of LED lighting and plastic reduction did not show statistically significant effects. These findings provided strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis H₀₁, confirming that the sustainable practices of street food vendors had a significant and positive influence on tourists’ food experiences in Varanasi. Following the first objective, the role of ethical practices on street food vendors in enhancing the food experiences of tourists was evaluated by applying a multiple regression analysis. In this regard, ethical practices adopted by street food vendors in Varanasi were taken as independent variables, and tourists’ food experience was taken as a dependent variable.

Table 2: Regression Model summary of ethical practices adopted by street food vendors in Varanasi and tourists’ food experiences

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p
1	(Constant)	.478	.231		2.070	.039
	Vendors offer fair prices, ensuring accessibility to food for all sections of society.	.146	.056	.135	2.591	.010
	Vendors maintain a high level of cleanliness at their stalls, ensuring food safety.	.111	.035	.146	3.213	.001
	Vendors provide fair wages and working conditions for their employees.	-.029	.043	-.030	-.664	.507
	Vendors do not engage in or support any form of child labor or exploitation of vulnerable individuals.	.245	.047	.253	5.239	.000
	Vendors take necessary steps to prevent contamination and ensure food safety.	-.013	.038	-.018	-.347	.729
	Vendors treat all customers with respect, regardless of their background or socio-economic status.	.180	.046	.186	3.874	.000
	Vendors clearly display ingredients, ensuring transparency and preventing allergens or harmful additives.	.065	.044	.082	1.472	.142
	Vendors celebrate cultural diversity by offering diverse food items from various regional or cultural backgrounds.	.110	.041	.150	2.693	.007
	Vendors pay their fair share of taxes, contributing to the local community and economy.	.036	.030	.055	1.176	.241
	Vendors employ women in various roles, providing equal opportunities in the workplace.	.039	.029	.060	1.314	.190
	Vendors offer healthier food options and promote a balanced diet among their customers.	.039	.033	.052	1.170	.243
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	1	Regression	106.907	11	9.719	29.474
Residual		114.090	346	.330		
Total		220.997	357			

As displayed in Table 2, the regression analysis produced an R-value of 0.696 and an R² of 0.484, suggesting that ethical practices explained approximately 48.4% of the variance in tourists’ food experiences. The adjusted R² of 0.467 indicated a good fit, and the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.873 showed no autocorrelation. The ANOVA results confirmed that the model was statistically significant (F = 29.474, p < .001). Several ethical practices emerged as significant predictors of tourists’ food experiences, including offering fair and transparent pricing (β

= .135, $p = .010$), maintaining hygiene and cleanliness in food preparation areas ($\beta = .146$, $p = .001$), avoiding child labor ($\beta = .253$, $p < .001$), showing respectful behavior towards customers ($\beta = .186$, $p < .001$), and promoting cultural diversity through varied food offerings ($\beta = .150$, $p = .007$). However, other ethical elements, such as ensuring food safety, ingredient transparency, and the promotion of healthier food alternatives, did not exhibit statistically significant relationships. These results led to the partial rejection of H_{02} , indicating that while not all ethical practices had a strong impact, several core elements of ethical behavior significantly contributed to enriching the tourists' food experiences. In pursuit of the third objective, the extent to which the cultural values and religious beliefs of street food vendors shaped tourists' culinary experiences in Varanasi was analyzed by applying multiple regression analysis.

Table 3: Regression model summary of cultural values and religious beliefs of street food vendors in Varanasi and tourists' food experiences

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
		.596	.355	.338	.41870	1.762
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p
I	(Constant)	1.626	.180		9.025	.000
	The food options cater to various religious dietary requirements and preferences.	.046	.027	.081	1.714	.087
	The destination is known for its signature local dishes and cuisine.	.107	.040	.144	2.699	.007
	The food offerings in the destination stand out for their uniqueness and originality.	.004	.038	.007	.116	.908
	There is a wide variety of food options available to cater to different tastes and preferences.	.142	.036	.214	3.915	.000
	The food scene reflects the local way of life and cultural practices.	.054	.034	.081	1.575	.116
	The food items reflect the diverse cultural influences present in the destination.	.030	.035	.044	.847	.398
	The food scene incorporates modern and innovative culinary trends.	.066	.033	.107	2.023	.044
	The food options are nutritious and promote health and well-being.	.091	.029	.158	3.173	.002
	Fresh, high-quality ingredients are used in food preparation.	.061	.026	.112	2.378	.018
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I	Regression	33.530	9	3.726	21.251	.000
	Residual	61.007	348	.175		
	Total	94.536	357			

The multiple regression model Table 3 for this objective yielded an R-value of 0.596 and an R^2 of 0.355, implying that 35.5% of the variance in tourists' food experiences was attributable to vendors' cultural and spiritual expressions. With an adjusted R^2 of 0.338 and a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.762, the model showed moderate strength and no serious issues of autocorrelation. The ANOVA confirmed the model's statistical significance ($F = 21.251$, $p < .001$). Among the factors that significantly influenced tourists' food experiences were the availability of diverse culinary options reflective of local culture ($\beta = .214$, $p < .001$), the integration of modern culinary trends with traditional practices ($\beta = .107$, $p = .044$), the perceived health benefits of the food served ($\beta = .158$, $p = .002$), the use of fresh and high-quality ingredients ($\beta = .112$, $p = .018$), and the presence of local signature dishes ($\beta = .144$, $p = .007$). However, aspects such as the uniqueness of offerings and adherence to religious dietary codes did not reach statistical significance. Based on these outcomes, the null hypothesis H_{03} was partially rejected, suggesting that while some cultural and religious aspects of vendor behavior played a meaningful role in shaping tourist experiences, others had a more limited impact. Examining the impact of remarkable culinary experiences on visitor happiness was the next goal, with an emphasis on how ethical behavior, sustainable techniques, and cultural-religious values can mitigate this link. The analysis was conducted in two stages to accomplish this. Multiple regression analysis was used in the first phase to ascertain how memorable dining experience features affected the level of satisfaction among tourists.

As evident from Table 4 below, the analysis yielded a strong R-value of 0.849, with an R^2 of 0.721. This indicated that approximately 72.1% of the variance in tourist satisfaction could be explained by the various dimensions of memorable food experiences. The adjusted R^2 value was 0.713, which further confirmed the model's robustness. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic was found to be 1.887, suggesting that there was no significant issue of autocorrelation in the data.

Table 4: Regression model summary of memorable tourists’ food experiences and tourist satisfaction

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
		.849	.721	.713	.28191	1.887
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p
1	(Constant)	.600	.117		5.122	.000
	The experience felt truly authentic and reflected the local way of life.	.059	.022	.090	2.645	.009
	I was able to engage in local cultural experiences that enriched my visit.	.116	.029	.150	3.978	.000
	The service quality provided during my stay exceeded my expectations.	.098	.023	.154	4.296	.000
	The overall atmosphere and ambience made the experience enjoyable.	.088	.020	.150	4.284	.000
	The food quality added significantly to the memorability of my trip.	.079	.024	.122	3.266	.001
	I found the experience to be novel and different from my past dining experiences.	.081	.023	.135	3.584	.000
	I had meaningful social interactions with local people and other travellers.	.089	.023	.137	3.803	.000
	The experience evoked a strong sense of nostalgia or personal connection.	.072	.020	.125	3.673	.000
	The sensory elements of the food served were rich and engaging.	.093	.021	.151	4.500	.000
	I found the price of the food items to be reasonable and justified.	.065	.019	.118	3.512	.001
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	71.219	10	7.122	89.613	.000
	Residual	27.578	347	.079		
	Total	98.797	357			

The results from the ANOVA table revealed that the regression model was highly significant ($F = 89.613, p < .001$), affirming the overall predictive validity of the model. Several key attributes of memorable food experiences were found to significantly and positively contribute to tourist satisfaction. These included engagement with local culture ($\beta = .150, p < .001$), service quality ($\beta = .154, p < .001$), overall atmosphere ($\beta = .150, p < .001$), sensory richness of the food ($\beta = .151, p < .001$), opportunities for social interaction ($\beta = .137, p < .001$), novelty of the food experience ($\beta = .135, p < .001$), and price justification ($\beta = .118, p = .001$). Each of these variables was statistically significant and exhibited a positive influence on tourist satisfaction. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis for (objective 4, part 1) H_{04a} , which posited that memorable food experiences do not significantly influence tourist satisfaction, was rejected for most variables tested. This supported the notion that memorable food experiences play a critical role in shaping overall tourist satisfaction. A moderated multiple regression analysis was carried out to address the second goal, which was to investigate the moderating influence of street food vendors' ethical and sustainable practices, as well as their cultural values and religious beliefs (CVRB), on the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and their memorable food experiences (MFE). The independent variable in this research was memorable culinary experiences, the dependent variable was visitor satisfaction, and the moderators were CVRB, ethical practices, and sustainable practices. The regression model was modified to include interaction factors between MFE and each moderator to test for moderation.

Table 5: Regression Model summary of the moderating role of street food vendors’ sustainable and ethical practices and their religious beliefs and cultural values on the relationship between tourists’ memorable food experiences and tourist satisfaction

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
		.851	.725	.719	.27873	1.865
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p
1	(Constant)	.724	.231		3.138	.002
	Memorable food experiences	.811	.034	.822	23.792	.000
	Sustainable practices	-.023	.039	-.017	-.599	.550
	Ethical practices	-.013	.026	-.014	-.498	.619
	Cultural values and religious beliefs	.041	.036	.039	1.117	.265
	INTERACTION_ Memorable food experiences* Sustainable practices	.074	.074	.028	1.001	.318
	INTERACTION_ Memorable food experiences* Ethical practices	-.103	.055	-.053	-1.877	.061
	INTERACTION_ Memorable food experiences* Cultural values and religious beliefs	-.085	.048	-.050	-1.770	.078
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	71.604	7	10.229	131.661	.000
	Residual	27.193	350	.078		
	Total	98.797	357			

Strong predictive ability was demonstrated by the regression model summary Table 5, which showed a R value of 0.851 and an R^2 of 0.725. This indicated that the independent variable, the moderator factors, and their interaction terms could account for 72.5% of the variance in visitor satisfaction. The model's robustness and generalizability were further supported by the adjusted R^2 value, which was 0.719. Furthermore, the dependability of the regression estimates was supported by the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.865, which showed that autocorrelation in the residuals was not a serious problem. The ANOVA results validated the overall model's significance, with an F-statistic of 131.661 ($df = 7, 350$) and a p-value less than .001. This demonstrated that the combination of the main predictors and their interaction terms significantly contributed to explaining the variance in tourist satisfaction. In terms of individual coefficients, memorable food experiences emerged as a strong and highly significant predictor of tourist satisfaction ($B = 0.811, t = 23.792, p < .001$), reaffirming the central role of food experiences in shaping tourists' overall satisfaction.

However, the main effects of the proposed moderators, sustainable practices ($B = -0.023, p = 0.550$), ethical practices ($B = -0.013, p = 0.619$), and CVRB ($B = 0.041, p = 0.265$), were not statistically significant. This indicated that, on their own, these factors did not have a direct impact on tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, the interaction terms testing for moderation effects also failed to reach statistical significance. The interaction between MFE and sustainable practices ($B = 0.074, p = 0.318$) was clearly non-significant. The interactions between MFE and ethical practices ($B = -0.103, p = 0.061$) and between MFE and CVRB ($B = -0.085, p = 0.078$) approached significance but ultimately remained marginally non-significant at the conventional 0.05 level. It was thus hypothesized that while memorable food experiences exert a strong and significant positive impact on tourist satisfaction, the proposed moderating roles of street food vendors' sustainable practices, ethical behaviours, and cultural-religious values were not statistically substantiated. Consequently, the null hypothesis H_{0b} (objective 4, part 2), which posited that the relationship between memorable food experiences and tourist satisfaction is not significantly moderated by the sustainable and ethical practices or cultural-religious values of street food vendors, was accepted. The comprehensive analysis for this objective concluded that memorable food experiences significantly enhance tourist satisfaction, with critical attributes such as cultural engagement, service quality, and sensory richness playing essential roles. However, the hypothesised moderating effects of street food vendors' sustainable practices, ethical behaviour, and cultural-religious values were not statistically supported. Although these factors alone did not influence satisfaction, the central role of memorable food experiences remained evident. Thus, the study affirmed the importance of food experiences while rejecting the moderating influence of the proposed variables.

Discussion

The study unequivocally demonstrated that the sustainable practices implemented by street food vendors in Varanasi exerted a substantial and positive impact on tourists' culinary experiences. The findings indicated that when vendors employed eco-friendly packaging, promoted the use of reusable containers, sourced ingredients locally, composted food waste, conserved water, and utilized organic ingredients, tourists reported enhanced food experiences. Conversely, certain practices, such as the use of LED lighting and the reduction of plastic usage, did not significantly affect tourists. Ethical practices were also found to be crucial. Offering fair pricing, maintaining cleanliness, avoiding child labor, treating customers with respect, and celebrating cultural diversity in food offerings were all identified as significantly enhancing tourists' food experiences. However, practices such as ensuring food safety, being transparent about ingredients, and promoting healthy food options did not exhibit a strong impact. The religious beliefs and cultural values of the vendors also influenced tourists' experiences. The availability of diverse food options, the use of fresh and high-quality ingredients, local signature dishes, the incorporation of modern culinary trends, and health-promoting food all contributed to improved food experiences. In contrast, the uniqueness of offerings and catering to religious dietary needs were not deemed significant. Memorable food experiences had a profound and positive influence on tourist satisfaction. Tourists who appreciated engaging with local culture, received excellent service, enjoyed the overall atmosphere, relished the sensory richness of the food, engaged socially, found the experience novel, and perceived the pricing as fair reported higher satisfaction. This indicated that a positive food experience left a lasting impression and enhanced satisfaction. However, when examining whether sustainable and ethical practices and cultural-religious values moderated the effect of memorable food experiences on satisfaction, the results were not statistically significant. This suggests that while these practices were important, they did not alter the impact of memorable food experiences on tourist satisfaction.

Conclusions

The study identified that the sustainable practices, ethical behavior, and cultural and religious values of street food vendors significantly influenced tourists' culinary experiences in Varanasi. Among these factors, sustainable practices exerted the most substantial positive impact, followed by ethical practices, and subsequently, cultural and religious values. This indicates that tourists recognized and valued vendors' eco-friendly and ethical conduct, as well as the reflection of local culture and beliefs in their food offerings. Notably, memorable food experiences were directly correlated with increased tourist satisfaction; the more profound the food experience, the greater the

satisfaction reported by tourists. However, the anticipated moderation effect, specifically whether the relationship between memorable food experiences and satisfaction was altered by vendor practices was not supported. Thus, while tourists favoured vendors who demonstrated sustainability and ethicality, these attributes did not modify the extent to which memorable food experiences influenced their satisfaction.

This study added new information to the theory of food tourism. It showed that vendor-related factors like sustainability, ethics, and cultural-religious values can strongly shape how tourists experience food. It confirmed that tourists care more about food than just taste, they also notice how vendors behave and what values they show through food. Practically, this research was helpful for local vendors, tourism planners, and authorities. Vendors in religious destinations can improve tourist experiences by focusing more on eco-friendly actions and ethical behaviour. Practices like keeping the place clean, using local and organic ingredients, and treating customers fairly were appreciated by tourists. Showing respect for culture and religion through food also made a difference. Tourism authorities could use these findings to promote a religious destination with rich, meaningful, and responsible food experiences. Creating awareness or guidelines for vendors about sustainable and ethical practices could help improve food tourism even more. In short, this study showed that focusing on memorable food experiences, along with sustainable and ethical vendor practices, could lead to happier and more satisfied tourists.

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