Culinary Experience and Destination Choice: Examining the Influence of Tourist Lifestyle and Local Food Authenticity in Kerinci

Gampo Haryono[1*)], Reni Yuliviona[2)], Kasman Karimi[3)]
[1]Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Sakti Alam Kerinci, Indonesia
[2,3]Universitas Bung Hatta, Indonesia
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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines the influence of tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity on destination choice in Kerinci Regency. It also explores the role of culinary experience in shaping tourists' decisions when selecting travel destinations. The study offers novelty by integrating tourist lifestyle and authentic local food within the context of culinary experience in an emerging culinary tourism destination.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This research employs a quantitative approach using a survey method involving domestic tourists visiting Kerinci Regency. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS.

Findings: The results show that tourist lifestyle plays an important role in influencing destination choice. Local food authenticity also contributes positively to tourists' decisions in selecting Kerinci as a travel destination. In addition, both tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity significantly influence culinary experience. Culinary experience itself has a positive effect on destination choice and acts as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between tourist lifestyle, local food authenticity, and destination choice.

Research Implications: The findings highlight the importance of developing authentic culinary tourism that aligns with tourists' lifestyles in order to enhance destination attractiveness. Tourism stakeholders and local governments are encouraged to promote local culinary identity and create memorable dining experiences to strengthen Kerinci Regency's position as a competitive tourism destination.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most important sectors contributing to economic growth and regional development in many countries, including Indonesia. Beyond generating foreign exchange and employment opportunities, tourism also plays a strategic role in promoting cultural heritage, strengthening local identity, and supporting infrastructure development (Ernawati, 2019). As global tourism continues to evolve, travelers increasingly seek meaningful and memorable experiences rather than merely visiting physical attractions. In this context, tourism is closely associated with the experience economy, where tourists pursue emotions, sensations, and personal memories during their travel activities (Grotte et al., 2023).

The growing importance of experiential tourism has encouraged destinations to develop unique attractions that can enhance visitors' experiences. One aspect that has gained significant attention in tourism studies is culinary tourism. Local food is not only a basic necessity for travelers but also an essential cultural element that reflects the identity and traditions of a destination. Culinary experiences allow tourists to interact with local culture through taste, ingredients, and traditional cooking methods, thereby creating deeper and more memorable travel experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014). Previous studies have highlighted that authentic local food can significantly enhance tourists' satisfaction and strengthen the attractiveness of tourism destinations.

Indonesia possesses rich natural and cultural resources that support the development of tourism, including culinary tourism. Among its many regions, Jambi Province offers diverse tourism potential, ranging from natural landscapes to cultural heritage attractions. One of the prominent destinations within this province is Kerinci Regency, which is known for its mountainous landscapes, lakes, and proximity to the Kerinci Seblat National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. These natural and cultural assets make Kerinci an emerging tourism destination with strong potential for sustainable tourism development.

In addition to its natural attractions, Kerinci is also recognized for its distinctive local cuisine. Traditional foods in this region are characterized by the use of natural ingredients and traditional cooking techniques that have been preserved across generations (Denisa & Verinita, 2021). Culinary specialties such as lemang, dendeng batokok, nasi beras payo, and Kerinci coffee reflect the cultural heritage and local wisdom of the community. These culinary traditions not only represent cultural identity but also contribute to tourists' overall travel experiences.

In contemporary tourism behavior, tourists' lifestyle has also become an important factor influencing travel preferences and destination choices. Lifestyle reflects individuals' patterns of interests, activities, and consumption behaviors that shape their travel motivations and expectations (Kim, Hwang, & Jung, 2024). Tourists with particular lifestyle orientations often seek destinations that offer experiences aligned with their personal preferences, including unique culinary experiences. Therefore, the interaction between tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity can play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions regarding destination selection.

Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of local food authenticity and culinary tourism in enhancing tourist satisfaction and destination attractiveness, limited research has examined the underlying mechanism linking these factors to destination choice. In particular, the mediating role of culinary or eating experience in explaining how tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity influence destination selection remains underexplored, especially in emerging tourism destinations outside major tourism hubs.

Considering the growing competition among tourism destinations and the increasing demand for authentic and experience-based tourism, understanding these relationships becomes increasingly important. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity on destination choice in Kerinci Regency, with culinary experience serving as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to provide insights for tourism stakeholders in developing strategies that integrate authentic culinary experiences with tourists' lifestyle preferences to enhance the competitiveness of emerging tourism destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Experience Economy and Consumer Behavior Perspective

This study is grounded in Experience Economy Theory and Consumer Behavior Theory to explain tourist decision-making in selecting travel destinations. Experience Economy Theory introduced by Pine and Gilmore suggests that modern consumers increasingly seek memorable and meaningful experiences rather than merely consuming products or services. In the tourism context, the value perceived by tourists lies not only in the physical attractions of a destination but also in the overall experiences they gain during their visit, including cultural and culinary experiences. Meanwhile, Consumer Behavior Theory explains that consumer decisions are influenced by internal characteristics such as values, preferences, and lifestyle. Lifestyle reflects individuals' patterns of activities, interests, and opinions that shape their consumption behavior and decision-making processes (Solomon et al., 2019). In tourism, these internal factors influence how tourists evaluate destinations and the types of experiences they seek during travel.

Integrating these two theoretical perspectives, this study proposes that tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity influence destination choice through the culinary experience experienced by tourists. Culinary experiences serve as an experiential mechanism that connects tourists' personal preferences with the cultural attributes of a destination.

Tourist Lifestyle and Eating Experience

Lifestyle represents an individual's pattern of living as reflected in activities, interests, and opinions that shape consumption preferences (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In tourism behavior, lifestyle influences how individuals allocate their time, resources, and travel preferences, including the type of experiences they seek during their trips. Tourists with experience-oriented lifestyles often prioritize unique and memorable activities, including exploring local culinary traditions. Food experiences can therefore become an important component of travel activities that align with tourists' interests and lifestyle preferences. Previous studies indicate that tourists' lifestyle orientation can significantly shape their expectations and perceptions toward culinary experiences at a destination (Kim, Hwang, & Jung, 2024). Therefore, lifestyle is expected to influence how tourists perceive and evaluate their culinary experiences while visiting a destination.

H1: Tourist lifestyle positively influences eating experience.

Local Food Authenticity and Eating Experience

Local food is widely recognized as an important cultural element in tourism destinations. It reflects the traditions, ingredients, cooking techniques, and cultural identity of a local community (Ostrom, 2018; Haryono et al., 2019). Authentic local food provides tourists with opportunities to experience local culture through taste and culinary practices. In culinary tourism, the authenticity of local food plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. Authentic dishes prepared using traditional ingredients and methods can create unique sensory and emotional experiences for visitors. Such experiences allow tourists to connect with the culture of the destination, thereby enhancing the overall travel experience. Previous studies have emphasized that authentic culinary offerings significantly contribute to tourists' positive dining experiences and destination image (Krisnanda et al., 2021). Therefore, local food authenticity is expected to strengthen the quality of tourists' eating experiences.

H2: Local food authenticity positively influences eating experience.

Tourist Lifestyle and Destination Choice

Tourist lifestyle also plays a significant role in determining destination preferences. Lifestyle shapes travel motivations, leisure activities, and consumption patterns, which ultimately influence how tourists select destinations (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015). Tourists tend to choose destinations that align with their lifestyle orientations and personal interests. For instance, tourists who value cultural exploration and experiential travel are more likely to visit destinations that offer unique cultural and culinary experiences. Consequently, lifestyle can directly influence destination choice as tourists seek destinations that match their personal identity and travel expectations.

H3: Tourist lifestyle positively influences destination choice.

Local Food Authenticity and Destination Choice

Local cuisine is increasingly recognized as an important determinant of tourism attractiveness. Authentic food not only fulfills tourists' physiological needs but also provides cultural value and unique travel experiences. Culinary offerings that reflect local identity can strengthen the image of a destination and enhance its attractiveness to visitors. Previous studies suggest that local food can serve as a key motivator in destination selection, particularly among

tourists interested in cultural and culinary tourism (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014). Destinations known for distinctive culinary traditions tend to attract tourists who seek authentic cultural experiences. Therefore, the authenticity of local food is expected to directly influence tourists' decisions when selecting travel destinations.

H4: Local food authenticity positively influences destination choice.

Eating Experience and Destination Choice

Eating experience refers to the overall experience tourists obtain when consuming food during their travels. This experience includes sensory, emotional, and cultural aspects that shape tourists' perceptions of food and the destination itself (Yang, Liu, & Xu, 2024). A positive dining experience can enhance tourists' satisfaction and create memorable impressions of the destination. When tourists enjoy authentic and satisfying culinary experiences, they are more likely to perceive the destination positively and recommend it to others. Therefore, eating experience is expected to play an important role in shaping tourists' destination selection decisions.

H5: Eating experience positively influences destination choice.

The Mediating Role of Eating Experience

Within the framework of the experience economy, experiences serve as an important mechanism that connects tourist preferences with destination attributes. Tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity may influence destination choice not only directly but also indirectly through the quality of culinary experiences experienced by tourists. When tourists' lifestyles align with authentic local culinary offerings, the resulting dining experiences become more meaningful and memorable. These experiences can strengthen tourists' emotional connection with the destination and ultimately influence their decision to choose or revisit the destination. Therefore, eating experience is proposed as a mediating variable linking tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity with destination choice.

H6: Eating experience mediates the relationship between tourist lifestyle and destination choice.

H7: Eating experience mediates the relationship between local food authenticity and destination choice.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a survey method to test the proposed hypotheses. Quantitative research focuses on collecting numerical data that can be analyzed statistically in order to examine the relationships among variables. The survey method was chosen because it enables researchers to collect data efficiently from a relatively large number of respondents while capturing their perceptions regarding the variables studied. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure tourist lifestyle, local food authenticity, eating experience, and destination choice. The population of this study consists of domestic tourists who have visited Kerinci Regency. Because the exact number of tourists cannot be determined due to varying travel periods and visitor origins, the population is treated as an infinite population. Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select respondents who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria include domestic tourists who have visited Kerinci Regency at least once, are at least 17 years old, and come from outside the administrative area of Kerinci Regency. These criteria were established to ensure that respondents have sufficient experience with the destination and its local culinary offerings. A total of 210 respondents participated in this study. The sample size is considered adequate for analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is commonly applied in studies examining complex relationships between latent

variables. PLS-SEM does not require strict assumptions of data normality and is suitable for studies with moderate sample sizes. The data collected were measured using a Likert scale to capture respondents' levels of agreement with each statement in the questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. This analytical approach allows the simultaneous examination of relationships among latent variables and enables the evaluation of both the measurement model and the structural model in order to test the proposed research hypotheses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Validity and Reliability Test

The validity and reliability of the measurement model were evaluated before testing the structural relationships among variables. Convergent validity was assessed using the outer loading values of each indicator. Based on the results, the outer loading values ranged from 0.773 to 0.864, which exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that all indicators have strong correlations with their respective constructs. According to methodological guidelines, outer loading values above 0.70 confirm that the indicators are capable of accurately measuring the intended latent variables. Therefore, the measurement model in this study meets the criteria for convergent validity and can be considered valid for further analysis.

Table 1. Composite Reability

| Variable	Composite Reliability	Info.
Tourist Lifestyle (X1)	0.962	Valid & Reliable
Local Food Authenticity (X2)	0.935	Valid & Reliable
Eating Experience (Z)	0.917	Valid & Reliable
Destination Choice (Y)	0.962	Valid & Reliable

Source: Data Processed by SmartPLS 3.2.8 (2025)

Reliability was evaluated using composite reliability (CR) to assess the internal consistency of each construct. The results show that all variables have composite reliability values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good reliability. The highest composite reliability values were found for the Lifestyle and Destination Choice variables, both reaching 0.962, suggesting a very high level of internal consistency among their indicators. Meanwhile, the Local Food and Eating Experience variables also demonstrated strong reliability with composite reliability values of 0.935 and 0.917, respectively. These results indicate that all constructs in this study have satisfactory reliability and are suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

Structural Model

After the evaluation of the measurement model confirmed that the research instruments met the criteria of validity and reliability, the analysis proceeded to the evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The structural model aims to examine the causal relationships among the latent variables proposed in the research framework.

Figure 1. Structural Model
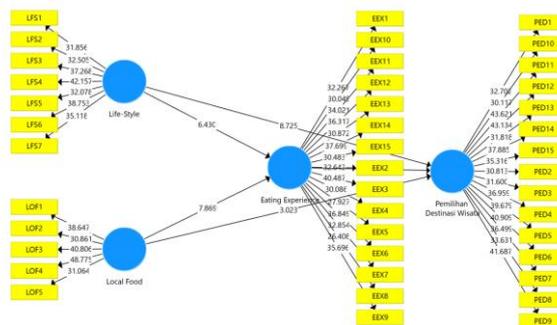
Source: Data Processed by SmartPLS 3.2.8 (2025)

In this stage, path analysis was conducted to assess the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The analysis produced path coefficients, which indicate the direction and strength of the relationships between variables. These coefficients are used to determine whether the relationships among variables are statistically significant and to evaluate the proposed research hypotheses.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is used to evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model by measuring the proportion of variance in the endogenous variables explained by the exogenous variables. In the context of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), R^2 indicates how well the independent variables explain the variation of the dependent variables in the model. According to methodological guidelines, R^2 values can be interpreted as follows: 0.75 indicates a substantial model, 0.50 indicates a moderate model, and 0.25 indicates a weak model (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, higher R^2 values indicate stronger predictive accuracy of the structural model.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination

Variables	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Information
Eating Experience (Z)	0.659	0.655	Moderate
Destination Choice (Y)	0.748	0.744	Substantial

Source: Data Processed by SmartPLS 3.2.8 (2025)

The results show that the R^2 value for eating experience is 0.659, indicating that tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity explain 65.9% of the variance in eating experience, while the remaining 34.1% is influenced by other factors outside the model. Furthermore, the R^2 value for destination choice is 0.748, meaning that 74.8% of the variance in destination choice can be explained by tourist lifestyle, local food authenticity, and eating experience. The remaining 25.2% is influenced by other variables not included in this study. These findings indicate that the structural model has strong explanatory power in explaining tourists' destination selection behavior.

Hypotheses Test
Direct Effect

The structural model was evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure to assess the significance of the relationships among constructs. Bootstrapping is a resampling technique that generates sampling distributions by repeatedly drawing subsamples from the original data, allowing the estimation of t-statistics and p-values for hypothesis testing (Zariman, Humaidi, & Abd Rashid, 2022).

Table 3. Direct Effect

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Eating Experience (Z) → Destination Choice (Y)	0.233	0.233	0.069	3.365	0.001
Tourist Lifestyle (X1) → Eating Experience (Z)	0.392	0.394	0.061	6.430	0.000
Tourist Lifestyle (X1) → Destination Choice (Y)	0.512	0.514	0.059	8.725	0.000
Local Food Authenticity (X2) → Eating Experience (Z)	0.483	0.482	0.061	7.869	0.000
Local Food Authenticity (X2) → Destination Choice (Y)	0.198	0.197	0.066	3.023	0.003

Source: Data Processed by SmartPLS 3.2.8 (2025)

The results indicate that tourist lifestyle has a positive and significant effect on eating experience ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that tourists with stronger lifestyle orientation toward experiential activities tend to have more positive culinary experiences during their visit.

Thus, H1 is supported. Furthermore, local food authenticity significantly influences eating experience ($\beta = 0.483$, $p < 0.05$). This finding implies that authentic local culinary offerings enhance tourists' dining experiences. Therefore, H2 is supported. The analysis also shows that tourist lifestyle has a positive and significant effect on destination choice ($\beta = 0.512$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that tourists tend to select destinations that align with their lifestyle preferences and travel interests. Consequently, H3 is supported. In addition, local food authenticity positively influences destination choice ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that destinations offering authentic local cuisine are more attractive to tourists. Hence, H4 is supported. Finally, eating experience has a positive and significant effect on destination choice ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.05$). This result indicates that positive culinary experiences contribute to tourists' decisions when selecting travel destinations. Therefore, H5 is supported.

Indirect Effect

The mediating effect of eating experience was examined using the bootstrapping procedure in PLS-SEM.

Table 4. Indirect Effect

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Tourist Lifestyle (X1) → Eating Experience (Z) → Destination Choice (Y)	0.091	0.092	0.031	2.959	0.003
Local Food Authenticity (X2) → Eating Experience (Z) → Destination Choice (Y)	0.112	0.112	0.037	3.066	0.002

Source: Data Processed by SmartPLS 3.2.8 (2025)

The results indicate that eating experience significantly mediates the relationship between tourist lifestyle and destination choice ($\beta = 0.091$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that tourists' lifestyle not only directly influences destination choice but also indirectly affects it through the culinary experiences they encounter during their travel. Tourists with certain lifestyle preferences tend to seek destinations that offer enjoyable and memorable culinary experiences, which subsequently strengthen their destination selection decisions. However, the magnitude of the indirect effect is relatively small, indicating that other factors may also influence tourists' final destination choices. Furthermore, the analysis shows that eating experience also significantly mediates the relationship between local food authenticity and destination choice ($\beta = 0.112$, $p < 0.05$). This result implies that authentic local cuisine enhances tourists' culinary experiences, which in turn positively influences their decision to select a destination. In other words, local food not only directly contributes to destination attractiveness but also strengthens tourists' perceptions through the quality of their dining experiences. These findings highlight the importance of developing authentic culinary tourism experiences. Destinations that emphasize traditional food authenticity, cultural storytelling, and memorable dining experiences can enhance tourists' emotional engagement and strengthen the overall attractiveness of the destination.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence regarding the role of lifestyle, local food authenticity, and eating experience in shaping tourists' destination choices. The results confirm that both individual characteristics and experiential attributes of tourism destinations play important roles in influencing tourists' decision-making processes, particularly in the context of culinary tourism.

The first finding indicates that tourist lifestyle has a positive and significant effect on eating experience. This result suggests that tourists' preferences, interests, and activity patterns influence how they perceive and evaluate culinary experiences during their travels. From the

perspective of Consumer Behavior Theory, lifestyle represents an internal psychological factor that shapes consumer perceptions, motivations, and consumption behavior (Solomon, 2018). Tourists with experience-oriented lifestyles tend to seek meaningful and memorable culinary encounters, which ultimately enhances their eating experiences at tourism destinations. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of lifestyle in shaping tourism experiences. For example, Krisnanda et al. (2021) found that lifestyle significantly influences culinary tourism experiences, as tourists with strong lifestyle orientations toward gastronomy and leisure activities are more likely to engage in local culinary exploration. Similarly, Kim and Eves (2012) demonstrated that tourists' lifestyle motivations play a crucial role in determining their participation in food-related tourism activities. In this context, lifestyle can be considered an important determinant that shapes the experiential aspects of tourism consumption.

The second finding shows that local food authenticity has a positive and significant effect on eating experience. This indicates that authentic culinary elements—such as traditional ingredients, local cooking methods, and cultural meanings embedded in food—enhance the quality of tourists' dining experiences. Authentic local food allows tourists to engage with the local culture and provides them with a unique sensory and emotional experience during their travel. This finding supports the perspective of Experience Economy Theory, which emphasizes that modern consumers seek memorable and meaningful experiences rather than merely functional consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In tourism, food is no longer perceived solely as a basic necessity but also as an experiential product that conveys cultural identity and heritage. Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of culinary authenticity in shaping tourist experiences. Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2014) found that authentic local cuisine significantly enhances tourists' overall experience at a destination. Similarly, Sthapit et al. (2019) reported that authentic food experiences contribute to tourists' emotional engagement and memorable tourism experiences. Therefore, authentic local cuisine can function as a form of experiential value that strengthens tourists' perceptions of a destination.

The third finding reveals that eating experience has a positive and significant influence on tourists' destination choice. This suggests that tourists tend to select destinations that offer enjoyable, memorable, and emotionally engaging culinary experiences. A positive eating experience contributes to favorable evaluations of a destination and ultimately influences tourists' travel decisions. This result is consistent with the argument that experiential value plays a key role in tourism decision-making. According to Consumer Behavior Theory, positive consumption experiences influence future behavioral intentions and decision-making processes (Solomon, 2018). In tourism research, Stone et al. (2018) found that memorable food experiences significantly affect tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness. Similarly, Yang et al. (2024) demonstrated that positive culinary experiences enhance tourists' destination evaluations and influence their intention to revisit or recommend the destination to others. These findings suggest that culinary experience is not only related to tourist satisfaction but also serves as an important determinant of destination choice.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis shows that eating experience mediates the relationship between lifestyle and local food authenticity on destination choice. This finding indicates that the influence of lifestyle and authentic culinary attributes does not operate solely through direct effects but also through the experiential value created during tourists' dining experiences. In other words, tourists' lifestyle orientations and the authenticity of local cuisine jointly shape the quality of eating experiences, which subsequently influence tourists' decisions to choose a particular destination. From a theoretical perspective, this mediating mechanism provides a deeper understanding of how internal and external factors interact in shaping tourism behavior. Lifestyle represents tourists' internal motivations and preferences, while local food authenticity represents the cultural attributes of a destination. Eating experience serves as the

experiential bridge that connects these factors with tourists' behavioral decisions. This finding reinforces the relevance of Experience Economy Theory, which highlights the role of memorable experiences in influencing consumer value perception and decision-making (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Overall, the results of this study highlight the strategic role of culinary experiences in tourism development. Destinations that successfully integrate authentic local food with meaningful dining experiences are more likely to create memorable tourism experiences and strengthen their competitiveness in attracting visitors.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies several important findings related to tourists' destination choices in the context of culinary tourism. The results show that tourist lifestyle has a positive and significant effect on eating experience, indicating that individual preferences, interests, and activity patterns influence how tourists perceive and enjoy culinary experiences at a destination. In addition, local food authenticity significantly influences eating experience, suggesting that the uniqueness and cultural value of regional cuisine enhance tourists' dining experiences. Authentic local food therefore becomes an important attraction that contributes to tourists' overall travel experiences. Furthermore, tourist lifestyle and local food authenticity both have a positive effect on destination choice. Lifestyle reflects tourists' personal preferences, while local food represents the cultural identity of a destination. These two factors play an important role in shaping tourists' travel decisions. The findings also indicate that eating experience significantly affects destination choice. Tourists tend to prefer destinations that offer enjoyable and memorable culinary experiences. Finally, the results confirm that eating experience acts as a mediating variable, strengthening the influence of lifestyle and local food authenticity on destination choice. This means that the better the eating experience perceived by tourists, the greater the likelihood that they will choose the destination for their travel.

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