

Malay Food Authenticity: The Impact on Experience and Place Attachment among Festival Goers

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000789>

Received: 02 November 2025; Accepted: 10 November 2025; Published: 24 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Authentic food is genuine or traditional food that has been inherited through generations, utilizing local ingredients. It symbolizes the cultural identity of an ethnic group. This study aims to examine the relationship between authentic food and experience on place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan. A descriptive, quantitative research design was employed, using a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. Data were analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0*. A total of 384 respondents, consisting of visitors to food festivals in Kelantan, participated in this study. The research focused on three objectives: to determine the level of place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan, to investigate the relationship between authentic food and place attachment, and to examine the relationship between experience and place attachment. The analysis revealed a correlation between place attachment and both authentic food ($r = .658, p < .01$) and experience ($r = .687, p < .01$). In conclusion, authentic food remains a preferred choice in contemporary society. Therefore, it is hoped that the public can preserve these traditional foods to prevent their disappearance and ensure they are maintained for future generations.

Keywords: Authentic Food, Malay Food, Experience, Place Attachment, Festival

INTRODUCTION

Food is an essential component of the tourism sector and can create unforgettable experiences. As is well-known, Malaysia is a country renowned for its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Each ethnic group is free to practice its own culture as long as it does not contravene national laws. The Malay ethnic group is the majority in Malaysia, followed by Chinese, Indian, and other minority groups. Given Malaysia's multi-ethnic population, it is unsurprising that Malaysian cuisine is diverse and can be enjoyed by all. Moreover, Malaysian society is strongly associated with traditional foods rich in various customs and cultures. Authentic food is defined as food originating from the heritage and culture of an ethnic group, utilizing their knowledge of local ingredients, plants, and animal sources (Kwon, 2015). According to Omar and Omar (2018), traditional Malaysian cuisine is generally multicultural. This is because traditional foods are known for heritage dishes such as those based on rice and seafood, and wrapped foods, which offer a variety of flavors: spicy, hot, sour, creamy, and sweet. In a research article by Suhaimi and Zahari (2014), the former Minister of Tourism, Dato' Seri Ng Yen Yen, emphasized that Malaysia's diverse cultures and foods serve as tools to showcase the country's identity and attract international tourists. The variety of local dishes reflects the culture that creates Malaysia's unique identity. Authentic food is not merely for satisfying tastes or as decoration at gatherings; it also projects the cultural identity of an ethnic group. Furthermore, authentic food symbolizes cultural values and worldviews. The uniqueness of Malaysian food culture, representing each ethnicity, has become part of the nation's gastronomic product (Mohammad & Chan, 2011). According to Karim (2020), authentic food can command premium

products and prices. To attract more tourists to Malaysia, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture created the slogan "Malaysia Truly Asia," focusing on promoting tourist destinations, food, shopping venues, and modern and traditional Malaysian festivals (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). Tourism Malaysia not only provides information on tourist destinations in the capital but also promotes famous destinations in every state, such as Kelantan.

Kelantan is a state in Malaysia located on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It is renowned for its cultural heritage and natural environment, which contribute to the growth of the tourism industry in this state (Hanan & Abd Hamid, 2017). Kelantan boasts various artistic heritage forms, including Mak Yong, *dikir barat*, *wayang kulit*, *silat tari*, and others. Furthermore, the state holds festivals almost every year to welcome tourists (Hanan & Aminudin, 2012), such as the international kite festival, food festival, and cultural festival. According to a 2019 report, Kelantan received 11 million visitors in 2019. Meanwhile, the number of tourist arrivals to Kelantan that year was 6.5 million. This figure represented a growth of 37.3 percent compared to 2018. These festivals indirectly help boost the economic and tourism sectors in Kelantan. However, this study focuses solely on food festivals held in Kelantan, which consistently highlight unique and distinctive foods (Hanan & Aminudin, 2012). Kelantan is indeed famous for its sweet foods, but they possess a uniqueness of flavor that sets them apart. Most visitors come to Kelantan specifically to try and savor the delicious authentic foods found in the state (Hanan & Abd Hamid, 2017), including *kuih akok*, *kuih tahi itik*, *kuih cek mek*, *kuih lompat tikam*, *kuih bunga tanjung*, *nasi tumpang*, *nasi kerabu*, *laksam*, and others. Authentic food in Kelantan also garners attention from domestic and international tourists (Mohammad & Chan, 2011). This is because the preparation process of authentic food has its own recipes, inherited from ancestors, giving this food its uniqueness and delicious taste (Muhammad et al., 2015). The authenticity of cuisine, based on genuine food, culture, and socio-economics, represents the true attitudes and implications of an ethnicity (Nurti, 2017).

Problem Statement

Food is often a key component in tourism, especially during festivals. However, behind the festivity of these celebrations, various questions arise regarding authentic food and its impact on visitors attending festivals in Kelantan (Hanan & Abd Hamid, 2017). Therefore, this study focuses on how authentic food and experience influence place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan. This research is necessary because, presently, traditional food is seen as having been significantly modified and influenced by external factors, no longer retaining the authentic characteristics of a place. According to Hanan and Abd Hamid (2017), food in Kelantan has been heavily influenced by Thailand due to certain factors. These include Kelantanese citizens marrying Thai nationals and subsequently relocating and settling in Kelantan. Consequently, Thai food has been introduced to Kelantan, leading to changes in the original recipes (Mohammad & Chan, 2011). As a result, authentic food in Kelantan has been altered and adapted, so the original recipes are no longer used. Research conducted by Mohammad, Tajulurrus Chan, and Jennifer Kim Lian (2011) in Thailand regarding Thai food appears to be one factor influencing the positioning of food.

Although authentic food is known, many younger generations are less aware, unfamiliar, or have never even heard of the names of traditional foods found in Kelantan. According to Muhammad, Nur Hafizah, Mohd Shahrin, and Humairah (2015), the modern world has exposed young people to other food collections, such as Western fast food, Japanese food, and more, as traditional food no longer offers variety. Meanwhile, Hanan and Abd Hamid (2017) state that Kelantan receives less focus, despite having various traditional heritage foods that have survived to this day. This is due to a lack of promotion of authentic food on social media, leading to diminished demand and the gradual fading of authentic food. Furthermore, innovative food products such as *cheese keropok lekor*, bubble tea, and others have gained attention and a place in society. According to Karim (2020), loss of interest, lack of early exposure to traditional food, and an attitude that glorifies foreign foods are considered contributors to the extinction of special dishes. Therefore, the authenticity of cuisine is crucial, as it can contribute to the cooking process and help preserve the identity and culture of Malaysian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Festival

Festivals are one element of tourism because they can attract many domestic and international tourists. Festival events are increasingly popular among visitors and can be linked to social, cultural, and economic change (van

Vliet, 2019). From a classical cultural-anthropological perspective, festivals have been defined by Getz (2010) as celebrations held at a specific time, marked by special observances. Festival celebrations honor the values, ideologies, and identity of a community. Festivals are considered cultural celebrations that hold a special place in the lives of society (Getz & Page, 2014). Not only cultural celebrations, but food festivals also hold a special place, particularly for food enthusiasts. According to Rivera et al. (2015), annually held festivals can serve as an element to attract visitors to participate in these events. van Vliet (2019) states that various types of festivals are held, such as the World Cup festival, music festival, tourism festival, and others. Moreover, people prefer to spend time outdoors engaging in activities or attending gatherings. This statement is supported by previous researchers, who state that festivals are part of the entertainment business often used for marketing and tourism purposes and have become a fixed element in popular and high culture (Getz, 2010). Rivera, M. Semrad, and K. Croes (2015) argue that in the case of festivals, the overall experience must be planned to create a unique and unforgettable experience in the minds of visitors. However, Aminudin & Hanan (2016) agree with this statement, emphasizing that festivals will fail if they do not produce something unique and attractive in the minds of visitors and sponsors. In this context, festivals are seen as a form of celebration, like carnivals, and can unite human relationships.

Authentic Food

Authentic food is indeed popular among the public and is often featured in festivals as a source of economic income in Malaysia. According to Hanan & Abd Hamid (2017), food is a major contributor that generates demand among domestic and international tourists to visit a place. "Authentic" is often described in terms of characteristics such as genuine, reliable, first-hand, true in content, and prototypical, as opposed to copied, reproduced, or performed in the same way as the original (Ram et al., 2016). Authenticity means a quality that is trustworthy (Hamzah, Humairah, Ab Karim, Muhammad Shahrin Othman, Mohiddin Hamzah & Azimi, 2013); authenticity implies heritage, consistent form, and reliability from the buyer's perspective. Authenticity can also mean unique, pure, or sacred.

Levyda, Giyatmi, and Kania Ratnasari (2019) classify authentic food based on specific local choices, stereotypical aspects, atmosphere, and human communication. Meanwhile, from a customer's perspective, authentic food involves traditional recipes, local ingredients, and personal attention. According to Mohammad & Chan (2011), traditional food is an expression of the culture, history, and lifestyle of local communities. For example, standardized restaurant chains like McDonald's and Starbucks might be considered authentic because they offer an 'authentic' Western experience (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). In the research of Ab-Latif (2018), authentic food is considered unique and natural because it possesses its own distinctive extrinsic product attributes. Meanwhile, researchers De Vries & Go (2017) state that authenticity not only requires the object to be genuine but also must be perceived by customers as unique and valid. However, there is research discussing the preservation of traditional food in Kelantan that seems more commonplace compared to the development of food tourism in this destination. The study by Mohammad and Chan (2011) focuses on the perceptions, beliefs, and values of authentic Malay Kelantan cuisine offered in restaurants, sampling visitors to selected restaurants, but not necessarily the tourists themselves. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that authenticity is a relative term (Ram et al., 2016).

Experience

Experience is an important element in travel and tourism. Destinations may hold experiential value (Ram et al., 2016). Stone, Soulard, Migacz, and Wolf (2018) propose a model describing food experiences as either "consummatory" (utilitarian needs to feed oneself) or "peak" experiences (hedonic engagement). In the context of tourism, the concept of authenticity has played a significant role in understanding tourist motivations and experiences (Rivera et al. 2015). Memorable destinations will have a competitive advantage by offering more amazing and extraordinary experiences (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Çetin and Dinçer (2016) describe food tourism as traveling for the purpose of enjoying the pleasure of food and beverages. This statement is supported by Cheng Yi, Joyce, Teh Li Chi, Ong Hui, Ying Wong, and Wen Wei (2018), who note that enjoying delicious and special food and tasting the cultural traditions associated with food are experiences often sought by tourists. Rivera, Semrad, and Croes (2015) state that there are four types of economic offerings (commodities, goods, services, and experiences). Consumer behavior has identified that the difference between experiences and other

offerings is that experiences are largely based on intrinsic and personal interpretation of the experience involving the consumer (Omar & Omar, 2018). In other words, the interpretation of experience occurs within the individual engaged in the multisensory experience. According to Twist et al. (2017), there has been an increase in visitor attendance at themed events at attractions during the off-peak period, especially those promoting special activities at specific times; however, little is known about the role of events in helping to attract visitors to overcome declining demand. Nevertheless, a well-constructed experience at the appropriate touchpoint will influence consumer memory; current research measures how the overall experience, economic value, and memorable experience can influence festival visitors' behavior to return (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015).

Place Attachment

Place attachment is a positive bond developed through behavioral, cognitive, and affective relationships between individuals or groups and various levels of their physical environment. According to Karsono (2013), the definition of place attachment encompasses positive emotional bonds between individuals and their environment. The emotional connection between self and place is known in psychology as 'place attachment' (Ram et al., 2016; Raymond et al., 2010; Nurhijrah, 2015; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Najafi and Kamal (2012) explain place attachment as the affective relationship between an individual and their environment. They state that place attachment consists of the interaction between affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions. However, several researchers have different views on place attachment. According to Lewicka (2011), place attachment involves the relationship of local communities with their specific, distinctive characteristics. Place attachment indicates the bonds formed by a community with specific places that provide comfort and security for living there.

In the tourism concept, place attachment is analyzed as a multifaceted concept, consisting of two to four interrelated components (Vada et al. 2019); Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). The first component, place identity, represents the tourist's identification with a particular place or its symbolic value (Ram et al., 2016; Ramli et al., 2016). The second, place dependence, describes how well a particular place meets the tourist's needs and can be considered a functional attachment component (Raymond et al., 2010 & Davis, 2016). Third, the affective component, the extent to which limited attention is received, refers to the strong feelings tourists have towards a destination (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). Fourth, social bonding, not directly related to the special aspects of the place, but with the enhanced social relationships in that particular place (Davis, 2016). Additionally, other studies refer to place attachment as a one-dimensional construct or an observational construct (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). According to Altman and Low (2012), place attachment is a concept derived from Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973 & Bowlby, 1980), a leading and influential psychological theory that considers attachment a relatively stable personality trait. According to this theory, individuals have a tendency to trust or distrust others based on early childhood experiences. According to Cheng Yi, Joyce, Teh Li Chi, Ong Hui, Ying Wong, and Wen Wei (2018), a tourist's experience in a place may be related to their feelings of authenticity but does not provide empirical evidence. Meanwhile, place identity typically refers to the emotional connection and meaningful social interactions between an individual and the place, such as "having a food tour here is very meaningful to me" (Dwyer et al., 2019). Therefore, social interaction may be valued by an individual because it facilitates interpersonal relationships and fosters a sense of group belonging.

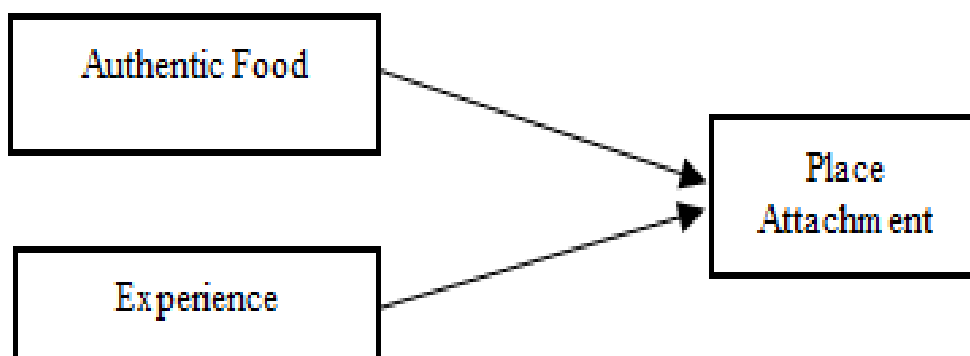


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative and descriptive design to collect data, using a questionnaire as the primary instrument to obtain all necessary information. The information obtained included demographics such as gender, age, religion, occupation, education level, and income. According to Abdul Rasid (2013), the quantitative approach is capable of measuring respondents' reactions and responses to limited questionnaires and can analyze the studied problems concisely and accurately. The population and sample for this study were drawn from visitors attending festivals in Kelantan. Sampling was conducted using random sampling to obtain data. Random selection was chosen because it is easier to obtain data and subsequently facilitates the researcher in analyzing the acquired data. The characteristics of respondents required to complete this study were specified: Malaysian citizens who had visited a festival in Kelantan. Tourist statistics were based on the number of tourists visiting Kelantan in 2019. Hanan and Aminudin (2012), in their research, found that 303,445 domestic tourists visited Kelantan in July 2011 during the Kelantan Food Festival held from July 1 to July 3, 2011. However, this number had increased to 2.15 million people (Report, 2019). Therefore, the sample size selected was 384 respondents, referring to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size. The researchers used a questionnaire as the research instrument, distributed online, to gather data and information regarding facts, beliefs, and desires to achieve the study's objectives.

The survey questionnaire was distributed online via *Google Forms* to visitors who had attended festivals in Kelantan. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted first to help researchers identify the feasibility or reasonableness of the actual study to be conducted, besides enhancing the validity of the research instrument (Jinal et al., 2018). This pilot study was conducted to determine the validity of the questions regarding whether authentic food and experience have a relationship with place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan or vice versa. For data analysis, the researchers used quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire. Data analysis involved two types: descriptive analysis and correlation analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to show mean scores and percentages to explain respondents' backgrounds and the level of place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan. Meanwhile, correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between authentic food and experience with place attachment. For this study, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0 was used to analyze the obtained data. The methods used in this study were based on the established objectives and research questions, as shown in the table below.

FINDINGS

Of the study participants, 35.9 percent were male and 64.1 percent were female, mostly aged between 20 and 30 years (69.2 percent). The majority of respondents held a Bachelor's Degree (47.4 percent). Most respondents were university students, hence they had an income of less than RM1000 (52.6 percent).

To confirm the level of agreement for the variables, mean scores were referenced. A mean score of 1.99 and below was rated as 'low,' while a mean score between 2.00 and 3.99 was classified as 'moderate,' and a mean score of 4.00 and above was rated as 'high.' The results showed that the means for authentic food ($m = 4.24 -- 4.69$), experience ($m = 4.39 -- 4.58$), and place attachment ($m = 2.40 -- 4.56$). It can be concluded that all variables had moderate to high scores (Shahzada, Khan, Noor, & Rahman, 2014).

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Authentic Food	19	.898
Experience	16	.917
Place Attachment	11	.802

The Cronbach's alpha values for the three indicators were .898, .917, and .802, respectively, all exceeding the suggested level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The Cronbach's alpha values obtained in the pilot study showed excellent values. This proves that the items or each question constructed have excellent validity and reliability and are suitable for the study.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Values

Variables	Pearson Correlation
Authentic Food	.687**
Experience	.658**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The finding shows that the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was very good. For the variable authentic food with place attachment, the relationship was positive with a value of .687. This clearly shows that the correlation between authentic food and place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan is significant, with a value of $r = .687$, $p < .01$. This proves that authentic food and place attachment have a strong relationship at a high level.

Furthermore, based on the results of the Pearson correlation analysis, it is clear that the relationship between experience and place attachment is positive, with a value of .658. This shows that the correlation between experience and place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan is significant, with a value of $r = .658$, $p < .01$. This proves that experience and place attachment have a relationship at a moderate level.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, authentic food highly influenced place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan. Authentic food influenced place attachment because each place has various unique traditional foods that can attract visitors. This is supported by previous research by De Vries & Go (2017), which indicated that authentic food is perceived as unique and genuine. Therefore, every place needs to provide authentic food to increase the frequency of visitors to Kelantan and to preserve the heritage of authentic food. Thus, it can be concluded that festival visitors still favor the authentic food found in Kelantan due to its uniqueness and distinctiveness.

Experience involves events respondents have undergone while visiting festivals in Kelantan. Past experiences also influence and are a priority for visitors to revisit festivals in Kelantan. This is also supported by previous research; Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) stated that a well-constructed experience at the appropriate touchpoint will influence consumer memory and the behavior of festival visitors to return. This clearly shows that respondents were satisfied with the past experiences gained while visiting food festivals in Kelantan.

In conclusion, the relationship of authentic food and experience to place attachment among festival visitors in Kelantan is very satisfactory and at a high level. This is proven through the analysis of findings conducted, which showed that authentic food and experience influence place attachment, where visitors perceive that food found elsewhere is not the same as the food in Kelantan. Furthermore, authentic food festivals are a priority for the tourism sector to attract international tourists to Malaysia, thereby contributing to the nation's economic growth. Therefore, it can be concluded that authentic food is crucial for maintaining the identity and culture of Malaysian society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris [project code 2019-0216-106-01].

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