

Thai Culture creates Value Added for Thai Culinary Tourism

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to assess foreign food tourists' behavior and level of satisfaction with Thai culinary schools located in Chiang Mai, Thailand and to determine how the incorporation of Thai culture in this course can create added value for culinary tourism. This research uses a mixed methodology. For the quantitative part, questionnaires were collected from 400 foreign tourists. The qualitative aspect of the research involves interviews with 26 culinary school entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai. The results indicate that most of the respondents took half a day class of Thai cooking with the objective of being able to cook Thai food back home. Some foreign tourists also took fruit and vegetable carving classes. The satisfaction level was at the highest level with respect to place, course, personnel, fees and distribution channel, and slightly lower for promotion. The interviews reveal that Thai culinary tourism is highly competitive hence the need to create added value in the form of Thai culture classes incorporated into the culinary lessons, something which some of the schools are already doing to some extent and which tourists are receptive to.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Culinary Tourism, Thai Cooking School, Thai Culture

1. Introduction

Culinary tourism in Thailand is becoming popular among foreign tourists as attested by the high number of Thai culinary schools in tourist cities such as Bangkok, Phuket, or Chiang Mai. According to TripAdvisor, in 2017, there were 90 cooking classes in Chang Mai and Bangkok alone (57 are in Chiang Mai and 33 in Bangkok). As a form of tourism, food tourism focuses on food being a selling point to tourist destinations by creating a variety of activities involving local gastronomy. Food tourism is present in various countries around the world. According to the Travel Industry Association (TIA), an estimated 17% of the leisure travel market engages in some form of culinary activities when travelling (Smith & Costello, 2009). Culinary experiences at tourism destinations are highly related to attitudinal, psychological, perceptual, and other behavioral factors (Yun, Hennessey, & Macdonald, 2011). The contribution of culinary tourists to the economies of the countries where food courses are offered can be significant

With 57 food schools, Chiang Mai is an attractive location for tourists eager to learn about Thai gastronomy. This is all the more the case as with beautiful mountains and an attractive climate, not to mention many tourist attractions, Chiang Mai and the region offer many other reasons for tourists to visit the place. However, as determined by Phattharathammaporn's (2008) study of the factors affecting foreign tourists' decision to visit Chiang Mai, the two activities that foreign tourists want to do most are to enjoy the scenery and taste/make Thai food. Clearly, Thai cooking classes are high on their list. Such interest has caused Thai culinary schools for foreign tourists to mushroom. Many of these tourists know about Thai food (there are many Thai restaurants around the world) but few really

know how to prepare it (Phochad, 2002). According to Na-apai (2013), foreign tourists who attend culinary classes in Chiang Mai expect to taste Thai food, learn about Thai culture, and acquire basic skills cooking Thai food. As determined by the food tourism industry in Thailand has a few weaknesses. They include: a the lack of consistent food tourism policy in each province, a lack of coordination between the public and private sectors organizing tourism activities related to food, and a lack of budget at the government level to support tourism. In terms of management, Kamkaen (2014) found that much of the personnel still has poor food traveling management skills and that there is a low use of information technology for public relation. And of great significance for this study, it was also found that there was lack of cultural links. This is precisely what has prompted these authors to conduct this research as it is their belief that value added Thai culture activities can be incorporated into Thai food courses. In light of the foregoing, the objectives of this research are thus to:

1. study the behavior of foreign tourists attending Thai culinary schools;
2. assess the level of satisfaction of foreign tourists toward these schools;
3. make recommendations on how to create added value through Thai cultural activities incorporated into the classes.

This research is expected to be beneficial to all those involved in food tourism and provide valuable insights.

2. Literature Review

- Marketing Mix

The tourism industry is unusual, when compared to other goods and services as demand varies considerably across seasons, holidays, and weather conditions (Crotts & Wolfe, 2011). For this reason, it has been suggested that marketing mix modeling can be thought of as a simulator, which moves marketing dollars from less to more productive activities so that the total attendance can be maximized without increases in the total marketing investment (Crotts & Wolfe, 2011; Bitner, 1990). McCarthy (1960) was first to suggest the 4Ps, Product, Price, Place of distribution, and Promotion as the primary ingredients of a marketing strategy. The concept of service marketing mix relates to 7Ps in the formulation of the marketing strategy: product, price, place, promotion, people or employees, physical evidence and presentation, and process (Kotler, 1994). This mix was expanded to 8Ps in relation to tourism by Jittangwattana (2014): product in tourism, price in tourism, place in tourism, promotion in tourism, people in tourism, packaging in tourism, programming in tourism, and partnership in tourism. Personnel is key to the delivery of services to customers (Muala & Qurneh, 2012).

- Culinary Tourism

There are several definitions of culinary tourism. They all refer to activities involving food and drinks while travelling. Long (2004) stated that “culinary tourism is about food; exploring and discovering culture and history through food and food related activities in the creation of memorable experiences” (p. 97). Culinary tourism has also been defined as “trips during which the purchase or consumption of regional foods (including beverages), or the observation and study of food production (from agriculture to cooking schools), represent a significant motivation or activity” (Ignatov & Smith, 2006: 35). Food tourism started to catch on with mainstream tourism during the period 2012-2018, with the help of and exposure from social media and television shows (Wolf, 2019). Food tourism now includes a full array of experiences associated with culinary practices, ranging from cooking classes, food producer visits, street food tasting, wall pub discovery, winery touring, and one-of-a-kind restaurant lunch or dinner (Long, 2013).

- Culinary Tourists

Culinary tourists want to experience food in its native habitat and sociocultural context, which provides an incentive to maintain those habitats (Long, 2013). Culinary tourists like high quality and artisan foods (either new or adapted recipes), preferably produced in sustainable ways, i.e., in smaller farms, handmade rather than relying on technology, and possibly organically grow. Using social value scales, Mack, Blose, and MacLaurin (2009) classified tourists into two sub-clusters; culinary tourist innovators and culinary tourists non-innovators. For culinary tourist innovators, two values are especially important; excitement and warm relationships with others. These aspects of the travel experience could very easily be stressed in campaign themes and made a more significant part of the actual consumer travel experience as a strategy to improve the attractiveness of new destination offerings. Innovative gastronomic tourism is an opportunity to develop territories to actively participate in the formation of innovative tourism attractiveness (Sandybayev, 2019).

- Chang Mai Culinary Tourists

According to Na-apai (2013), foreign tourists who come to Chiang Mai to learn to cook Thai food have the following expectations: participate in relevant activities, experience the true taste of Thai food, learn the local culture, acquire cooking skills, learn the cooking process, and have fun. Many foreign tourists want to be able to cook Thai food by themselves once they complete the classes (Phochad, 2002). They generally know Thai cooking from travel guidebooks and typically choose famous cooking schools near their accommodations. The course, however, must be approved by government agencies. The instructor should be cheerful, friendly with learners, have a good personality and be able to speak a foreign language (usually English). They expect clean equipment and enough for all the learners in the course. Foreign tourists want value for their money, i.e., knowledge and services. They also expect promotions such as aprons, cookbooks, etc. (Trihas, Kyriakaki, & Zagkotsi, 2016).

- Thai Culture

One way Thai culture manifests itself is in the dressing style (Chanchai, 2013). Thai people have a unique style often using silk as materials. Male villagers wear loincloth, which has been used from time immemorial and is still worn by elders in Northeast and Southernmost Thailand. But it is not unlikely that traditional dresses may disappear in many places (Chanchai, 2013). There is a strong connection between Thai culture and Thai food (Tantaweewong, 2013). Food reflects the beliefs, values, and ways of life of locals and the nature of the ingredients available. Achieving a balance of flavors and textures is a key aspect of Thai cuisine. Eating customs are also an important part of Thai culture that cannot be ignored. Thai food was originally eaten with the fingers and it still is in certain regions. When serving oneself from a common platter, one should not put more than one spoonful onto one's plate at a time (Lonely planet, 2019). Heaping one's plate with a full portion at once will look greedy to Thais unfamiliar with Western conventions.

- Value Added

In order to create more value for the food tourism industry, culinary school owners need to develop products or services that include personnel and image value (Jittangwattana, 2014). The value added needs to reflect the price food tourists are willing to pay for the services and products they expect. Techajawet (2004) has identified three types of value. One is 'value enhancers,' products or services that have never been offered in a market. Because there are selling points, the company that offers them will be able to quickly expand market share and have a competitive advantage over competitors. A second type is 'value maintainers,' products or services that will continue to maintain value in the minds of customers. This should eventually lead to value addition factors. A third one is 'value destroyers,' that is

value reduction in the minds of customers due to the weakness of products and services, which the company needs to improve urgently.

3. Research Framework and Methodology

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework developed for this study, which focuses on how to value can be added to the culinary tourism industry incorporating Thai culture.

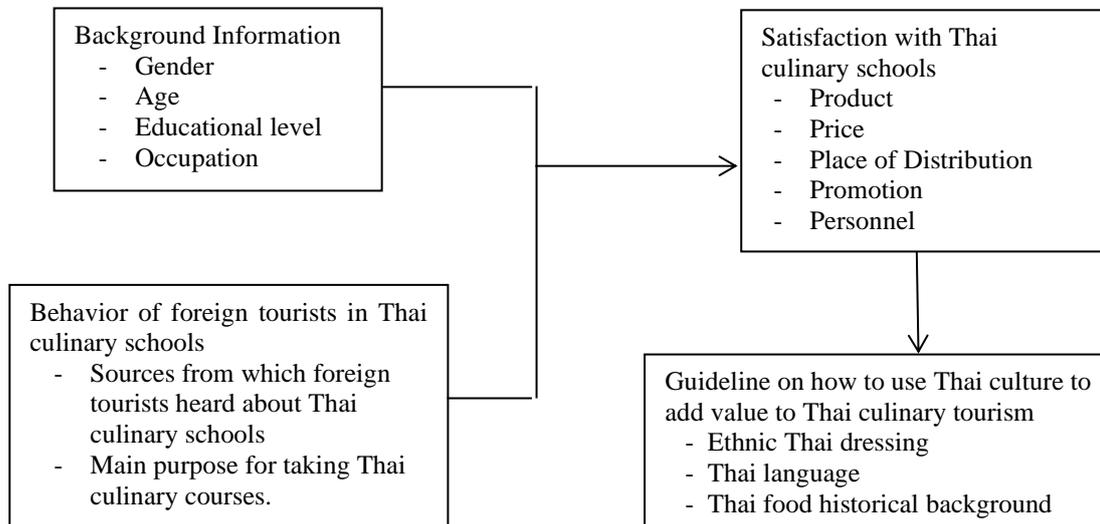


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This study on how Thai culture can add value to Thai Culinary Tourism uses a mixed methodology and thus combines qualitative and quantitative research. Questionnaires were collected from foreign tourists between February and August 2017 and in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs conducted between November 2018 and March 2019.

- *Quantitative Research:* The Non-Probability Sampling Technique of Accidental Sampling was used to determine the number of respondents to be surveyed for this research study. Since it was not possible to know the size of the population of foreign tourists using the services of Thai culinary schools in Chiang Mai, the following calculation method was used to determine the sample size. When it is not possible to know the population Cochran (1953) recommends a 95% reliability level and a significant level of 0.05. The sample size (n) was thus calculated according to the following formula:

$$n = \frac{p(1-p)z^2}{e^2}$$

z = 1.96 for a confidence level (α) of 95%,

p = proportion (expressed as a decimal)

e = margin of error.

z = 1.96, p = 0.5, e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{0.5(1 - 0.5)1.96^2}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$= 384.16$$

$$n \approx 385$$

The sample size is equal to 385 (the number was then rounded to 400).

The questionnaire used as research instrument is divided into 3 parts: Part 1 focuses on demographic characteristics (gender, age, education level and occupation); Part 2 explores the reasons for foreign tourists to attend a Thai culinary school in Chiang Mai and the way they learn about it; and Part 3 zeroes in on their level of satisfaction with the place, course, personnel, fee, and distribution channel and promotion. After verifying the data collected from the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using statistical package to calculate the statistical values and test the established hypotheses with a reliability of 95% and at a statistical significance level of 0.05. The Test Reliability of the questionnaire was 0.983. A Descriptive Statistics Analysis was used to sort out the data by frequency, showing them in tables by percentage. Satisfaction was measured by way of means and standard deviations describing interval scale data.

- *Qualitative Research*: To gather data on the way the incorporation of Thai culture into the curriculum of food schools, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 entrepreneurs/owner of Thai culinary school in Chiang Mai. They were purposively chosen because of their location, their experience dealing with service foreign food tourists, and the availability of information about their schools on TripAdvisor. The open-ending questions focused on their courses, the types of cooking, times of classes, fees, instructors, etc. Of course, they were also asked their views on the idea of adding value to their schools using Thai cultural elements in the classes.

4. Results and Discussion

As Table 1 shows, a majority of the foreign tourists attending Thai culinary schools in Chiang Mai at the time of the survey was females. This is not really a surprise that, even though restaurants are still largely the realm of men, at home, cooking most often remains a women's responsibility. As the percentage indicates, though, men are also interested in learning. So advertising and promotion should reflect this dual interest. They were between 21 and 30 years old and a majority of them have a graduated bachelor's degree. Both characteristics (youth and good educational background) are often associated with open mindedness and flexibility, which in turn suggests these generations are interested in new experiences.

Table 1: Profile of Foreign Tourists

Demographic Characteristic		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	169	42.25
	Female	231	57.75
Age	20 and below	48	12.00
	21 - 30	159	39.00
	31 - 40	109	27.25
	41 - 50	57	14.25
	51 - 60	28	7.00
	61 up	2	0.50
Education level	Lower than Bachelor Degree	92	23.00
	Bachelor Degree	270	67.50
	Higher than Bachelor Degree	38	9.50
Occupation	Agriculture	71	17.75
	Government employee	130	32.50
	Private company employee	61	15.25
	Business owner	132	33.00
	Student	6	1.50

The results indicate that most foreign tourists heard about Thai culinary schools from friends, Trip Advisor, Website, Google+, and travel agencies. This finding is consistent with Henderson's (2009) recommendation that tour operators and travel agents should emphasize the importance of local food and suggest dining options as they play a key advisory role during the decision-making phase of holiday makers. As Table 2 shows, as a source of knowledge of the services which Thai culinary schools offer, they rank third, right below friends and acquaintances and family, and above Facebook, Brochure/Billboard, Travel magazine, Tourism Authority of Thai land, Instagram to name a few.

Table 2: Foreign Tourists' Source of Knowledge of Thai Culinary Schools

Foreign Tourists' Source of Knowledge of Thai Culinary School Services	Number	Percentage
Friend /Acquaintance	240	60.00
Family	40	10.00
Travel agency	43	10.75
Tourism Authority of Thailand	13	3.25
Travel magazine	21	5.25
Brochure/Billboard	26	6.50
Website	84	21.00
Google+	49	21.00
Trip Advisor	166	41.50
Facebook	29	7.25
Instagram	12	3.00
Youtube	11	2.75
Twitter	5	1.25

As Table 3 shows, foreign tourists' main purpose in attending Thai culinary schools in Chiang Mai was to develop the ability to cook Thai food by themselves at home, have fun, and experience a new aspect of Thai culture. This is in keeping with Na-apai's (2013) research study which concluded that foreign tourists taking Thai cooking lessons in Chiang Mai expect to learn about Thai food flavors, Thai cooking peculiarities, Thai culture, and enjoy their classes. Some foreign tourists also indicated that learning Thai cooking was part of an education trip to Thailand.

Table 3: Foreign Tourists' Purpose Learning Thai Cooking

Main Purpose for Taking Thai Culinary Courses	Number	Percentage
Be able to cook Thai food by themselves	200	50.00
Have fun	111	27.75
Develop a career	1	0.25
Experience SOMETHING NEW	50	12.50
learning about Thai culture	30	7.50
Part of an education trip	8	2.00

Foreign tourists took part in five types of Thai cooking activities: theoretical and practical classes, visit of fresh markets, purchase of ingredients, and taste of the dishes cooked by participants. Some Thai cooking schools also offered fruit and vegetable carving classes, visits of backyard gardens, and traditional and cultural activities.

The 26 entrepreneurs interviewed come from the following 26 Thai food schools: (1) Air's Thai Culinary Kitchen, (2) Aromdii Family Cooking School, (3) Aroy Aroy Chiang Mai Thai Cooking School, (4) Baan Hong Nual Cooking School, (5) BaanThai, (6) Basil Cookery, (7) Cooking with Nokjee, (8) Galangal, (9) Green Mango Thai Cookery School, (10) Kuao BanThai, (11) Mama Noi Thai Cookery School, (12) May Kaidee's Cooking School, (13) Me & Mom Cooking, (14) Pantawan Cooking School, (15) Pra Nang Chiang Mai Thai Cookery School, (16) Red Chilli, (17) Siam Home Cooking, (18) Siam Rice Cooking; (19) Thai Akha Cooking School, (20) Thai Cottage Home Cookery School, (21) Thai Garden Home Cookery, (22) Thai Kitchen Cookery Centre, (23) Tom Yum Thai Cooking, (24) We cook Thai Home Garden Cooking school, (25) Yummy Tasty Thai Cooking School, and (26) Zabb E Lee Thai Cooking School. These Thai culinary schools were chosen because of their locations, the fact that they are reviewed in TripAdvisor, a popular website for foreign tourists, and their providing services to foreign tourists.

All the entrepreneurs interviewed mentioned the high level of competition in the Thai culinary school sector, a fact attested by the above list as all these schools compete with one another. While, as their names indicate, some of them seek to target a niche market within the sector, they nonetheless all compete for essentially the same pool of foreign tourists. One of the reasons Thai food schools have mushroomed in the area (as we saw earlier, Chiang Mai has more schools than Bangkok) is the young generation's strong interest in self-employment. Many entrepreneurs worked as salaried tourist guides or hotel staff before they made the shift to self-employment and opened their own Thai culinary schools. In their view, culinary tourism offers opportunities that they would never have had elsewhere. Former hotel cooks, for example, believe that their traditional occupation would not have given such a possibility to now earn money, which sharing their skills with tourists does, meanwhile elevating their social and economic status, (Long, 2013). Apparently, the prospect of facing tough competition is not a deterrent and hardly interferes with their resolve to open their own business.

In terms of marketing mix and level of satisfaction, the findings show the following characteristics with regard to the 26 Thai food schools involved in this research study:

- Product/Service:

The courses were offered either as full-day or half-day classes. Those opting for a half-day course could either take a morning, afternoon, or evening class. In addition, special courses, private courses, and more than one-day courses were offered so as to meet customer needs. Most foreign tourists chose morning courses. The type of cooking which they chose to learn about was for the most part quintessential Thai dishes (papaya salad, pad Thai, cashew nut with chicken, tom yum kung, tom kha kai, etc.). As Singsomboon (2014) noted, foreign tourists want to learn to cook Thai dishes that have an authentic Thai flavor. Topping the list of the dishes they chose to learn about are pad Thai, panang curry and massamun. Many of them were also interested in learning about local food such as khao soy curry or Chiang Mai noodles curry. Typically, one course covers several of these dishes, with between 15 to 20 minutes for each one (15 minutes for fried noodles Thai style, 15 minutes for sticky rice with mango, etc.).

As Table 4 shows, the level of satisfaction with the services offered was the second highest. Foreign food tourists were satisfied with its functional value (average 4.62) and the uncomplicated curriculum as well as its variety (average 4.59). They also appreciated the quality of the explanations provided (average 4.52). Those who took a special course were pleased as it met their needs in terms of cooking procedures and sources for the ingredients used (average 4.50). All the participants really like the infusion of Thai culture insights as

part of the classes (average 4.47). In addition, the food tourists sampled for this study were generally satisfied with the places where the courses took place (Table 4). Those in attendance indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the atmosphere, reflective of Thai identity (average 4.61), the location, making travelling convenient (average 4.59), the safety and adequacy of the cooking equipment, including typical Thai utensils' (average 4.58), the good ventilation and (average 4.55) and the cleanliness and hygiene (average 4.54).

- Price:

Tuition fees for a full-day course run between 1,000–1,300 Thai Baht (USD31-40), and between 800–1,000 Thai Baht (USD24-21) for a half-day course. Understandably, the fees for special or private courses are slightly higher, between 2,000–3,000 Thai Baht (USD 62-93). As indicated in Table 4, the level of satisfaction with the fees was 'highest.' Participants overwhelmingly felt the fees were fair and were satisfied with the range of prices offered (average 4.37) and thought the knowledge imparted and services provided were worth their money (average 4.39). They also liked the various types of payment available (cash, credit card and online, average 4.41). They also appreciated the cheaper fee charged to those accompanying class attendants but not learning Thai cooking (average 4.33). In addition, the food tourists sampled for this study were generally satisfied with the places where the courses took place (Table 4). Those in attendance indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the atmosphere, reflective of Thai identity (average 4.61), the location, making travelling convenient (average 4.59), the safety and adequacy of the cooking equipment, including typical Thai utensils (average 4.58), the good ventilation and (average 4.55) and the cleanliness and hygiene (average 4.54).

- Place of Distribution:

Most entrepreneurs pointed out that a majority of foreign tourists either books courses online and through Facebook or contacts Thai travel agents or tour agents. A few simply book the courses at sale offices downtown. All those attending the culinary classes were satisfied with the booking and payment arrangements at the highest level (average 4.31). They also liked the sales office location downtown (average 4.26) and the walk-in flexibility (not booking in advance), a good option for those undecided or acting on the spur of the moment (average 4.23). Along the same rationale, booking and paying fee at the Thai culinary school directly was also greatly appreciated (average 4.13).

- Promotion:

Most of the Thai culinary schools examined in this study rely on brochures, websites, and coordination with international tour agencies turned marketers to provide information on their services and promote their schools. In addition to online media (such as for example Facebook) and their own websites, some have opened an office in the city for booking. In addition, foreign tourists could get information and able to purchase courses at international agencies. As suggested by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO) (WTO, 2012), schools could also rely on the following actions to promote gastronomic tourism: organize promotional events, take part in international tourism fairs, dedicate websites on gastronomic tourism, have blogs, and organize familiarization trips for journalists and tour operators. Some of them though involve substantial costs which many of them cannot afford. This is all the more the case as most of the entrepreneurs interviewed lamented the lack of governmental support. According to them, the government seldom promotes Thai culinary schools in Thailand. For one, Thai culinary schools are not listed on the website of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), which means that foreign tourists or professionals involved in the tourism industry must turn to the schools' own Websites or Youtube to review cooking classes and culinary tourism.

Promotion was the only construct not to record a highest level of satisfaction (it received a ‘high’ level. The only ‘highest’ level relates to transportation from and to the participants’ places of accommodation (average 4.56). While those foreign food tourists availed themselves of various channels of public relations (average 3.82) and appreciated the discounts and the gift sets offered (average 3.74) as well as promotions such as for example two courses, free for one full menu, the results indicate that they feel more could have been done.

- People:

Most of the instructors are the owners of the culinary schools where they give cooking lessons. Most of the schools have at least 2 or 3 assistants who help them take care of customers while they cook. During the high season, they usually hire more assistants so as to maintain the same level of services and care. Most of the instructors have had vocational training and have credentials as cooks. The schools seek to use quality ingredients, proper kitchen equipment and competent instructors and assistants.

Table 4 indicates that the satisfaction level with regard to the personnel foreign with whom food tourists deal was the third highest. Foreigners first and foremost appreciated the instructors’ clear explanations and accurate answers to their questions (average 4.76) as well as their gentle manners, clean appearance and impeccable body hygiene (average 4.71). They also liked the knowledge and expertise of the Thai cooks and their easy-to-understand explanations and how hard they try to make cooking look easy and how much attention they paid to them while cooking (average 4.68). Another point of satisfaction was their good command of English and calm and cheerful ways of sharing their culinary knowledge (average 4.67). Helping customers in a timely manner also scored high (average 4.65) as did their level of satisfaction level with the assistants.

Table 4: Average Satisfaction Levels and Standards of Deviation

Satisfaction Items Attending Thai Culinary Schools	Satisfaction		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
Place	4.57	0.53	Highest
Course	4.53	0.52	Highest
Personnel	4.62	0.73	Highest
Fee	4.38	0.68	Highest
Distribution channel	4.23	0.73	Highest
Promotion	3.91	1.01	High

- Value-Adding Thai Cultural Activities

As to value-adding Thai cultural activities, this is an issue to which every entrepreneur should attach great importance as they could make a significant contribution to their bottom line and enhance their image. As the above discussion of the level of satisfaction registered by school participants shows, such activities are much appreciated by foreign food tourists. Instructors should therefore systematically include Thai culture in their curriculum and make sure they have a good knowledge and a solid understanding of it so as to incorporate it in a relevant manner in their classes.

They could for instance teach foreign tourists Thai dances, tell legends (story telling), and develop a narrative of the Thai eating culture and food history, e.g. why do we eat what we eat, what to eat, what is suitable for what, etc. (Gheorghe, Tudorache, & Nistoreanu, 2014). In addition, a database about Thai food should emphasize the health benefits of Thai food and the medicinal values of some of the ingredients, indicate where to buy them, post pictures of

recipes, and add any other information that could be of value to foreign food tourists. Thai culture could also be shown in the clothes Thai people traditionally wear, which tourists could wear while learning Thai cooking. For example, schools could use local cloths to make aprons, which could be given away as a free gift to foreign tourists. This would among other consequences support local and community products. Finally, consistent with Rocharungsat's (2011) suggestions, Thai greeting culture (paying respect, saying "Sawatdee", etc.) could be incorporated into the cooking lessons, thereby expanding the range of cultural information imparted, something which tourist would value. Figure 2 shows how Thai culture could create added value to the Thai culinary tourism.

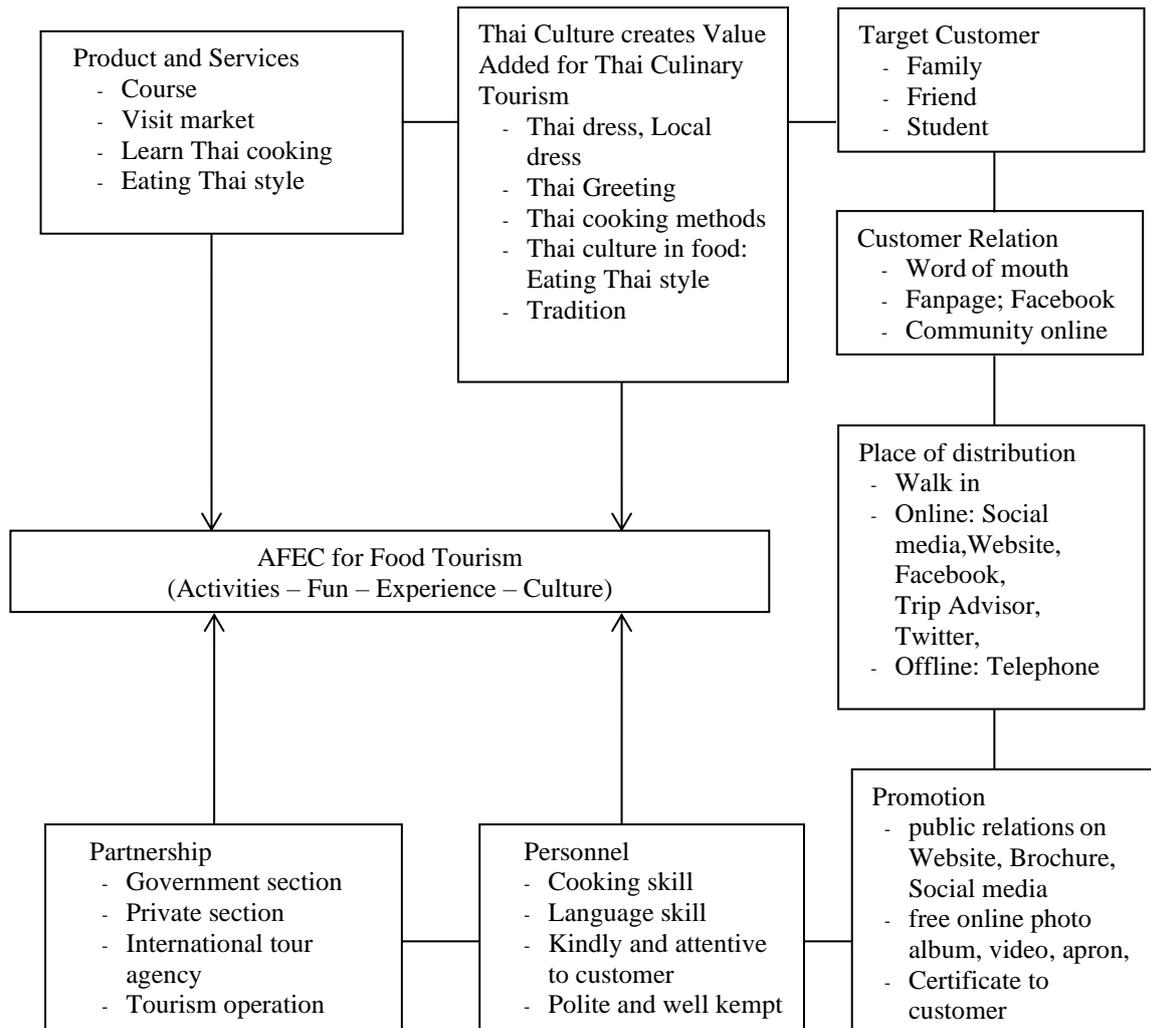


Figure 2 Creating Added Value through Thai Culture

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

A majority of the foreign tourists who attended food classes at culinary schools in Chiang Mai was female. Most of these tourists are between 21 and 30 years old and have a bachelor's degree. Most of them learned about the course on their own. The classes they attended typically consisted of theoretical and practical classes, visits of fresh markets, purchases of ingredients, and sharing the dishes cooked. Some tourists also took part in fruit and vegetable carving classes, visited backyard gardens, and joined traditional and cultural community activities. The level of satisfaction among foreign tourists was 'highest,' with 'place' and

'product' topping the list. 26 Thai culinary schools in Chiang Mai were involved in the in-depth interviews. It appears from the interviews with them that a lot of schools blend some basic elements of Thai culture, such as greetings or traditional clothing, into their culinary courses, thereby adding to the cultural dimension of their offering. Most businesses rely on brochures, their website, and international travel agents to promotion activities and enroll students. Collaboration with international travel agents is recommended by Henderson (2009) who found that food is the subject of various types of tourism products and a common theme in marketing by businesses and destination authorities. The kind of tourism in which food plays a primary or supporting role is already popular and has good prospects but there are a number of challenges for the food and tourism industries to overcome which the following suggestions and recommendations seek to address.

- Suggestions to Culinary Schools

Incorporating elements of Thai culture into culinary classes could create added value. This is in keeping with Porter (1985) and Serirat's (1998) value chain concept as they argue that entrepreneurs must develop products or services in which the following four values should be included: (i) Product value, (ii) Service value, (iii) Personnel value, and (iv) Image value. Consequently, Thai culinary schools could create value by using Thai culture as follows:

1. Creating activities that convince customers to join the courses not just for the food experience but also for the cultural enrichment. Publicizing information on Thai dining culture and the value ascribed to Thai food will whet the appetite of food tourists for first-hand experience on the ground and go a long way in generating interest in the courses.
2. Offering services that increase customer value, including after-sales service. This can start with picking up customers at their accommodation places and taking them back and giving them small souvenirs such as cook books, aprons, or certificates. These would give them lasting memories and facilitate word-of-mouth advertising or even lead to some repeat customer.
3. Developing IT to increase interaction with customers (those who have taken the course and potential ones). Being able to communicate with instructors from abroad may prove to be very valuable for food tourists who made need some advice or extra information. Instructors can also share photos of dishes, make suggestions, etc., and have a Facebook Fanpage. While this may use up time, this would be a well-worth investment.
4. Focusing on human resources (HR) management so that the personnel remain loyal (no high employee turnover) and in order to eliminate the cost and uncertainties involved in hiring and training new employees. If Thai food tourists like the staff members, the schools should make sure they keep them and provide incentives to do so accordingly. In recruiting, instructors must focus on applicants' expertise in Thai cooking; Thai culture and foreign languages (English, Chinese) and on their service minded approach and willingness to help customers as well. Since it is difficult to find instructors with such qualifications, Thai culinary schools, apart from retaining those with the right attitude and skills, should therefore join hand with educational institutes to train students and ensure they develop all these abilities, most notably a solid grasp of Thai culture as related to food.

Policy Recommendations

Given the current lack of governmental support, as we just saw, the following recommendations can be made:

1. The government should adopt a policy systematically promoting Thai food tourism through the organization of product fairs, Thai cooking Roadshows, Thai Travel Marts, and trade shows at domestic and international events.

2. The TAT should launch a robust public relations campaign, starting with a listing of all the Thai culinary schools in a special section on the TAT website. This would first require the TAT to establish some minimum standards, which the schools should meet to qualify for their listing, which would raise foreign tourists' confidence in the quality and authenticity of the school courses and curriculum.
3. In the same vein, the Ministry of Tourism should, in collaboration with educational Institutions, co-manage the development of a curriculum that would include local recipes in addition to the iconic national 'must have' dishes.

Recommendations to Culinary Schools in Chiang Mai

Culinary schools could adopt a number of practices as follows:

1. Thai culinary schools should promote Thai cooking courses by making Thai food a cultural icon, as is the case with traditional Thai dresses or Thai festivals (Loy Krathong, Songkran), all widely known and discussed on online public relations media, internet, and shown in photos on various social media.
2. Thai culinary schools could have a Thai actor, an international celebrity, or any other famous person endorse Thai culinary schools by having pictures taken while cooking and posted on various social media
3. Thai culinary schools should develop a curriculum that is internationally recognized by cooking pundits and include local specialties such as Khao Soy (a typical Northern Thai dish).
4. Instructors should have a story with each Thai dish recounting its origin and whenever possible wear native garments typical of the region of origin. Local music could also be played in relation to the dishes cooked.
5. Thai culinary schools should make greater use of websites, Facebook, Line, and e-commerce to promote and market their services.

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