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An examination of the gastronomic landscape in riverside cities of Thailand

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the potential of gastronomic tourism development related to built environment context for attractiveness and competitiveness in three riverside cities near Bangkok: Pad-Rew, Tha-Chalom and Mae-Klong, which are often perceived as less known tourism destinations. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research analysed restaurant type and location utilizing Google Maps data and conducted field surveys to assess restaurant menus and their integration with the built environment, focusing on establishments offering local specialties. We identified the relationship between local materials, the restaurants and their location in the landscape of the cities. The findings revealed

KEYWORDS

gastronomic landscape
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food tourism
local cuisine
built environment
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culinary heritage

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a limited number of restaurants that truly represented the local gastronomy, but also provided opportunities to develop gastronomic tourism. The study recommended leveraging the abundance of local gastronomic assets to create new activities and businesses related to gastronomic tourism, capitalizing on their unique culinary heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a crucial driver of development for economies worldwide, offering opportunities for both developed and developing countries (Tasci and Knuston 2004; OECD 2020). In Thailand, the industry has generated numerous jobs in service and hospitality industry, and demonstrably boosted the economy through job creation, entrepreneurship, foreign income and infrastructure advancements (United Nations 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted on Thailand's tourism due to the country's lockdowns. However, in 2022 Thailand recovered to 11.15 million tourist visitors (Reuter 2023), which underscores the resilience and continued importance of the tourism sector (Dechsupa et al. 2020). Despite the success of Thailand's tourism industry, a major challenge lies in its uneven geographical distribution, in which destinations like Bangkok, Chiangmai, Phuket and Chonburi (Pattaya) receive a disproportionate share of tourists. There are 55 other provinces which are also rich in cultural heritage and scenic beauty and have potential in tourism industry, but have been under-explored in terms of tourism business with low number of tourists compared to the major destinations (Local Alike n.d.; TAT 2018; Vithayaporn et al. 2023).

In recognition of this disparity, the Thai government has undertaken several initiatives to promote a more balanced distribution of tourism benefits, with the initiative of the 'Secondary Cities Tourism Campaign' for which a list of provinces or cities was selected by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) (2018). This initiative includes offering tax breaks and other financial incentives for both domestic and international tourists who choose to explore secondary cities as their destination. Additionally, marketing campaigns highlight the unique local traditions, cultural heritage and culinary offerings of different regions, leveraging Thailand's diverse cultural landscape to attract tourists seeking authentic experiences (TAT 2018). Research by Sudsawasd et al. (2022) suggests that increasing domestic tourism in these 'Secondary Provinces' can contribute significantly to creating new economic opportunities for local communities, fostering a more balanced and inclusive approach to economic development.

This research investigates the potential of gastronomic tourism in three riverside cities near Bangkok: Pad-Rew, Tha-Chalom and Mae-Klong, which boast proximity to the capital and their reputation for authentic local cuisine. This concept of tourism aligned to the country's 20-Year National Strategy or Thailand Economy 4.0 plan, which emphasizes strengthening the agricultural sector through sustainable practices while gastronomic tourism could serve as a potential driver to promote and create more value to local producers and potentially could contribute to economy approximately 1–2 per cent of the country's GDP (Anuroj 2018; Piboonrungraj et al. 2023). The research has employed a mixed-methods approach using quantitative research of the data retrieved from the map, empirical field research and analysis of the built environment of each city and its relationship to food businesses and tourism

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activities. This analysis aims to provide recommendations for enhancing these cities' attractiveness and competitiveness within the realm of gastronomic tourism.

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

Gastronomic tourism, food tourism or culinary tourism all refer to tourism in which the main reason for travelling is food (Hall and Mitchell 2006). However, gastronomic tourism itself was defined by the World Tourism Organization (2012) as a travel experience centred on engaging with food and related products and activities at a destination. This includes seeking out authentic, traditional or innovative culinary experiences that reflect the local culture and cuisine. Boonpienpon and Wongwiwattana (2017) positioned it as a form of 'traveling for food', where tourists actively seek unique aspects of a destination's food culture, including preparation processes, production methods and even dining customs. Dixit (2019) described that gastronomic tourism is the intersection of food and travel as food has become central to the tourism experience, differentiating destinations and connecting tourists to local traditions. From farm-to-table dining to cooking classes, gastronomic tourism taps into agriculture, culture and tourism, creating unique and memorable experiences for travellers.

To establish food in tourism as part of the contemporary experience economy, gastronomic tourism emerges as an intensive experience-based industry (OECD 2012). It transforms the consumption of food from a commodity into a memorable event, mirroring the shift from products to services highlighted by Pine and Gilmore (2011) (Figure 1).

Notably, gastronomic tourism is also considered a sub-category of creative tourism. While creative tourism covers creative potential of tourism through active participation in courses and learning experiences related to local culture, arts and crafts, it shifts the focus away from tangible sites and emphasizes intangible heritage (Richards and Raymond 2000). Hjalager and Richards (2002) highlighted the intricate connection between gastronomic tourism and a destination's landscape and built environment, and argued that successful gastronomic experiences often hinge on offering 'unique' aspects of food culture specific to that location. De Jong et al. (2018) further emphasized that leveraging gastronomic tourism for development requires not only expanding culinary offerings (restaurants, food stores) but also investing in physical infrastructure. This includes signage, parking, walking trails and picnic areas – all elements that contribute to an 'indigenous and incremental development' of food-focused tourism experiences. In essence, utilizing gastronomic tourism as a development tool necessitates policy changes and asks for a potential reshaping of a destination's landscape.

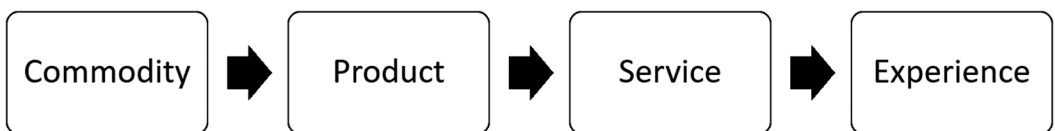


Figure 1: Experience economy transformation. Adapted from Pine and Gilmore (2011).

LOCAL FOOD

The definition of local food could vary depending on the context in which it is used. Waltz (2011) defined local food as food produced within a short distance from where it is consumed, emphasizing geographical proximity. Similarly, Dunne et al. (2011) described local food as tied to the geographic distances between production and consumption, with 'local' often recognized by the public as a marketing term. Eriksen (2013) identified three types of proximity: geographical proximity, which refers to the physical distance between production and consumption; relational proximity, which involves close relationships among actors within the food system; and proximity in values, such as origin, traceability, freshness and quality.

Wilk (2006) takes the concept further by suggesting that 'local' extends beyond just physical distance to include cultural, social and economic dimensions. Local food involves not only sourcing from nearby farms but also the relationships and practices that link food producers and consumers within a specific region. The sense of locality encompasses the identity and traditions of a place, influencing how food is consumed and experienced. In a globalized world, maintaining local identity in food systems becomes both a challenge and an opportunity for creating meaningful and sustainable food experiences. Enthoven and Van den Broeck (2021) noted that local food systems have been promoted as tools for fostering inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems, underlining their many perceived benefits.

In Thailand, the study of local food in tourism focuses on how tourists and foreigners experience the authenticity of dishes and the variety of culinary experiences (Cohen and Avieli 2004; Sunanta 2005; LUNCHPRASITH and MACLEOD 2018). From a local perspective, Sompong and Rampai (2015) identified four key components of local food knowledge: (1) cultural history and traditions, (2) ingredients, cooking methods and the cultural value of Thai food, (3) the alignment of local food with indigenous identities and seasons and (4) the importance of healthy food. However, there has been no study specifically addressing local food in terms of the physical distance of ingredients or material sourcing.

THREE RIVERSIDE CITIES

Food has played a significant role in driving tourism in many cities, particularly in the riverside cities of Pad-Rew, Tha-Chalom and Mae-Klong, which are known among tourists for their restaurants offering fresh, locally sourced produce (Muangmee et al. 2019; Pariwongkhunton et al. 2021; Puaksanit and Pasunon 2021). Research indicated that the overall food experience, the emphasis on food safety and freshness, and the connection to the surrounding environment were the key perceptions of food tourism in these cities. The cities have much potential to receive larger number of tourists as they are located within the range of one to two hours' drive from Bangkok, the capital of Thailand (Figure 2). However, they were listed as secondary cities in tourism, with lower number of tourists compared to major tourist destination cities (Table 1). Well-known local food materials and produces of these secondary tourist destinations are shown in Table 2. Hypothetically, the tourists or travellers could stop by these cities, then dine and travel to other places or easily go back to the capital city.

Chachoengsao, also known as Pad-Rew, is a city located about 70 km east of Bangkok along the Bangpakong River. The city's names reflect its

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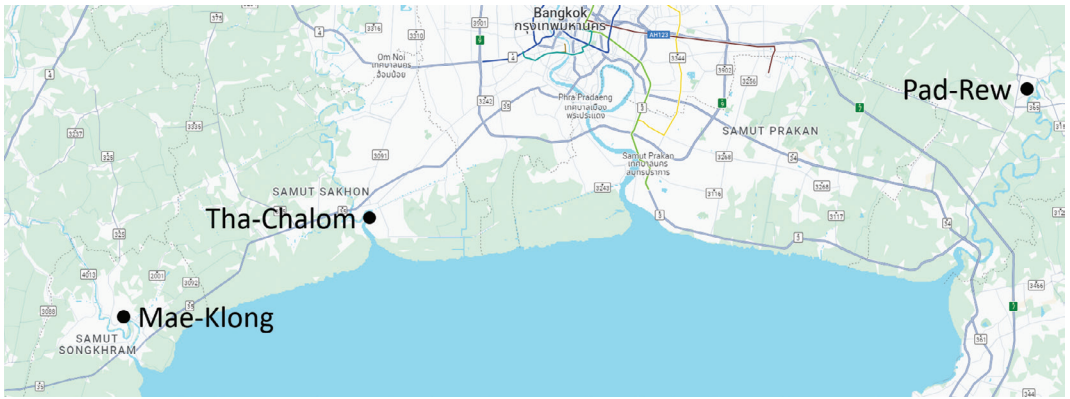


Figure 2: Map of Bangkok with Pad-Rew, Tha-Chalom and Mae-Klong. Source: Google (2022).

Table 1: Number of tourists.

Province	No. of total tourists in 2022	No. of Thai tourists in 2022
Chachoengsao (Pad-Riew)	328,329	326,714
Samut Sakhon (Ta-Chalom)	273,379	272,243
Samut Songkram (Mae-Klong)	733,381	723,371
Phuket	5,767,471	2,431,119
Chiang Mai	5,926,652	5,148,480

Source: Ministry of Sport and Tourism (2023).

Table 2: Local food materials.

Destinations	Materials
Pad-Rew	Snakehead fish, catfish, cichlid, carp, eel, tilapia, carp, gourami, freshwater prawn, some local seafood
Tha-Chalom	Fresh and semi-processed seafood; fish, prawn, squid, shrimp paste
Mae-Klong	Coconut, coconut sugar, lychee, pomelo, razor clams, short mackerel

history and geography: Chachoengsao comes from a Khmer word meaning ‘deep canal’, while Pad-Rew refers to a folk story that the Bangpakong River contained a lot of huge river fish that were big enough to be cut into eight pieces (Pad = eight, Rew = cut), indicating the abundance of aquatic resources (Chachoengsao Provincial Office n.d.). The area surrounding the city in the province also has been famous for the ‘fresh water’ food production or aquaculture, including snakehead fish, catfish, prawn and cichlid (DEPA 2023) as shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 shows dishes from restaurants in Pad-Rew made of products of the aquaculture.

Tha-Chalom, a community of fishermen, is located on the western bank of the Tha-Chin River. The name Tha-Chalom means ‘pier of the vendor boat’, which is similar to a junk (Wongthes 2018). The community has been known for its factories that produce ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat food

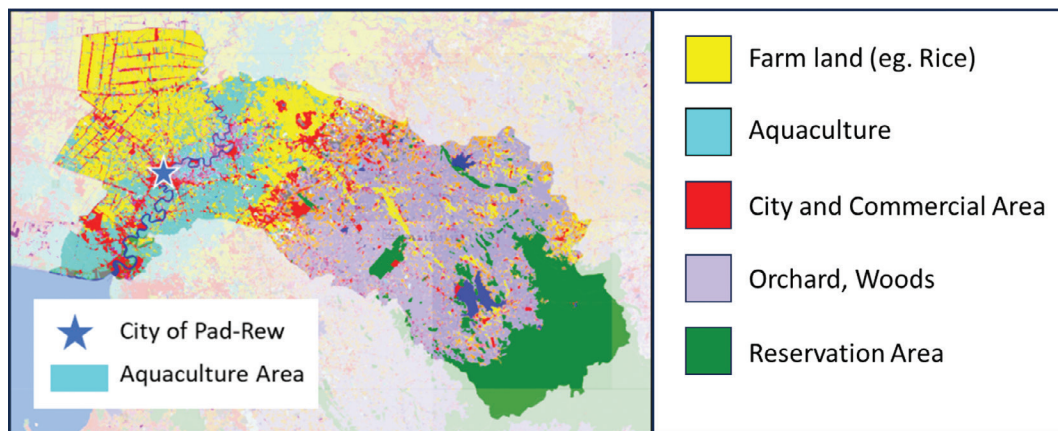


Figure 3: Land used of Chachoengsao. Source: Land Development Department (2021).



Figure 4: Dishes of Chachoengsao. Source: Authors.

for exporting to the global market (Jariyasombat 2014). The products have ranges of fresh and dried seafood including shrimps, squids and variety of fishes, and processed or food products such as shrimp dumplings and crab meat rolls which tourists can eat at many shops in the community or take away the uncooked food back home, as shown in Figures 5 and 6 (Wattanavanitvut 2016).

The city of Mae-Klong in Samut Songkram province is located at the mouth of a river. The fertile environment fosters a diverse range of agricultural products surrounding the city, including lychee, pomelo and coconut. Additionally, the area is famous for sea salt production and the rich fishery, particularly renowned for its razor clams and the city’s signature short mackerel (Srimaneekulroj 2015) as shown in Figure 7, while Figure 8 showcases the city’s food products and signature dishes.

Within the realm of tourism development, renowned restaurants specializing in local cuisine with the locally sourced materials could function as drivers for economic growth. These establishments act as magnets, attracting visitors specifically interested in local culinary experiences in cities. By leveraging

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Figure 5: Fresh seafoods in Tha-Chalom. Source: Authors.

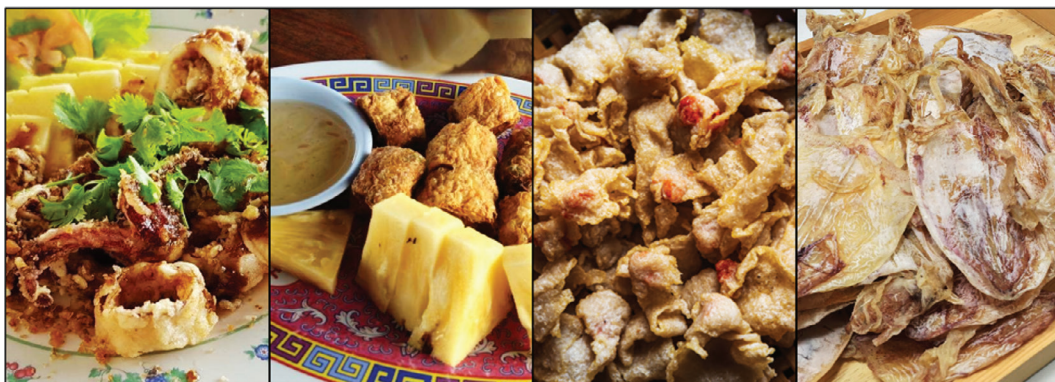


Figure 6: Dishes and product in Tha-Chalom. Source: Authors.

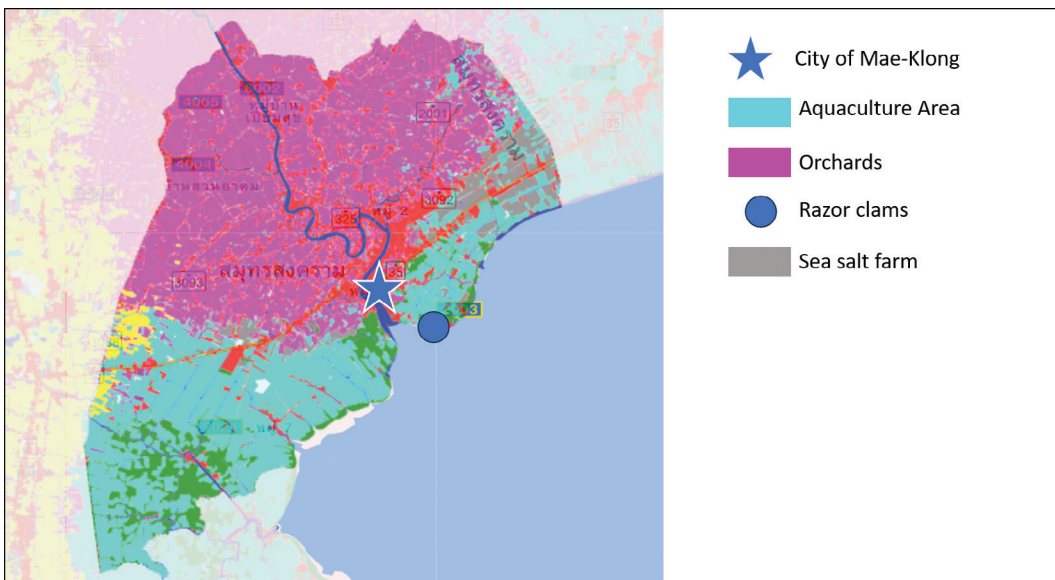


Figure 7: Land used of Samut Songkram. Source: Land Development Department (2021).



Figure 8: Dishes and product in Mae-Klong. Source: Authors.

locally sourced ingredients, these restaurants not only offer a taste of regional identity but also forge strong connections with local producers.

The appeal of these destinations was further enhanced by the integration of food and environment, particularly in scenic natural and riverside settings, which significantly enrich the visitor experience. The authenticity and quality associated with local ingredients played an important role in attracting tourists, while the unique environmental context of these restaurants creates a more immersive and memorable experience. This fosters an interdependent relationship between tourism, food service and agriculture, creating the benefits for both the restaurants and the surrounding communities.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The research applied the data from previous study conducted by Yodsurang et al. (2023) that created the walkable route for tourist in municipalities' area. Initially, the names and locations of the restaurant were gathered from Google Map API as the Google map data which is widely used by tourists and consumers for online search. The retrieved information (Google 2021) provided data and description of the hundreds of restaurants, including the street food, food stalls and food vendors, as displayed in Figure 9.

Following data retrieval from the Google Maps API, the authors implemented a multi-step filtering process to identify local restaurants within each city. First, restaurant types were categorized, focusing on establishments offering local cuisine. This involved excluding entries for non-Thai restaurants, such as Japanese or pizza or other restaurants which served international types of menus. Second, 'non-local' restaurants were filtered out. This category encompassed chains or franchises with headquarters outside these provinces, as well as restaurants offering Thai cuisine from other parts of the country (e.g., north-eastern Thai food). The final results of this filtering process, representing the identified local restaurants, were presented in Table 3 under the 'Local restaurant' column.

Then, the field research was conducted. The research team visited the restaurants from the local list and explored their menus through websites and social media platforms. The team validated and compared the retrieved data and the field survey. In addition, the research team evaluated their recommended menus

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Figure 9: The mapping of the restaurants in municipalities' areas (Yodsurang et al. 2023).

Table 3: Analysis of restaurants.

City	Total	Local restaurant	Final	Restaurants
Pad-Rew	536	36	13	Banmairimnam, Banpanu, Reonromsai, the river barn, Meenammeepala, Maturros, Ruayroenpae, Pradit pochana, Kinlomchompla, Kungnang, Baanben seafood, Kruamaesomkleng, Kruaplatheun
Tha-Chalom	154	80	10	Jejue, Jemai, Krua Lungtuk, Teehaihong dumpling, Jiamhengli, Krua chom ao, Tee pochana, Jechaliew, Tha-Chin dumpling, Krua banyai
Mae-Klong	328	140	18	Daeng seafood, O-larn seafood, Krua Namtip, Pan Tai seafood. Pratad seafood, Jinda riverside, Ruen wari, Krua tangge, Yao seafood, Je kekhuai, Rim nam, Sawai seafood, Rim kuen, Chawlay, Krua krumu seafood, Krua cha-on, Krua bo-baimai, Daeng rimnam

Source: Authors.

and food products, and investigated their connection to the local materials and ingredients as stated earlier in this article. The results from the field survey are shown in Table 3 in the column 'Final' and the names of the restaurants with local materials and ingredients in their menus are shown in the column 'Restaurants'. In addition, a sample of recommendation pages of menus, which were analysed for the local connection, is shown in Figure 10.

The restaurants or food places were classified with the criteria of the Department of Health's (1992) five types of food service including: (1) hotel restaurant – a restaurant located within a hotel, (2) restaurant – a large restaurant, where meals are served indoors and staff wear uniforms specific to the restaurant, (3) garden restaurant – a large restaurant where meals are primarily served outdoors with uniformed staff, (4) casual restaurant – a small indoor restaurant with one or two shophouse rooms and (5) beverage, dessert or ice cream shop which sell only those products. The survey results found dumpling, noodle and local food kiosks which are not classified as restaurant, but meet the local material criteria, and are considered important for gastronomic tourism of



Figure 10: Example of pages with recommendations in menus. Source: Authors.

Table 4: Types of representable restaurants.

City	Total	Restaurant	Garden/outdoor restaurant	Casual restaurant	Food kiosk	By the river
Pad-Rew	13	7	6	-	-	13
Tha-Chalom	10	2	2	3	3	3
Mae-Klong	18	10	4	3	-	5

Source: Authors.

each city. The research team also marked the restaurants and food places that are located by the river as they have special potential for tourism (Table 4).

FINDINGS

The findings of the study could be digested into three key points as follows:

1. *Number of restaurants offering local menus:* The number of all types of restaurants or food kiosks which could represent local gastronomy of the city by providing local menus and cooked with local materials were eighteen restaurants in Mae-Klong, thirteen restaurants in Pad-Rew and ten restaurants in Tha-Chalom.
2. *Proximity and connection to attractions:* The distance and connectivity between restaurants and tourist attractions contribute to gastronomic tourism, improving the flow of tourist traffic, increasing both economic benefits for local businesses and overall competitiveness of the destination (Jiménez-Beltrán et al. 2016; Basle 2023). The restaurants and food vendors in Tha-Chalom were located in walking distance from tourist attractions. This is in contrast with Pad-Rew and Mae-Klong, where the restaurants are scattered and not directly connected to key tourist spots.
3. *Location and atmosphere:* Despite the fact that these cities shared river-side settings, the urban environments and restaurant experiences differed significantly. All thirteen establishments in Pad-Rew are situated along the Bang Pakong River, utilizing the river as an asset for the dining experience. In contrast, the restaurants in the other two cities are more scattered. There are five restaurants in Mae-Klong that offer the river view while the

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food vendors in Tha-Chalom present a contrasting scene, in which only three restaurants are located by the Tha-Chin river. The specific atmospheres of these restaurants are shown in Figures 11–14.

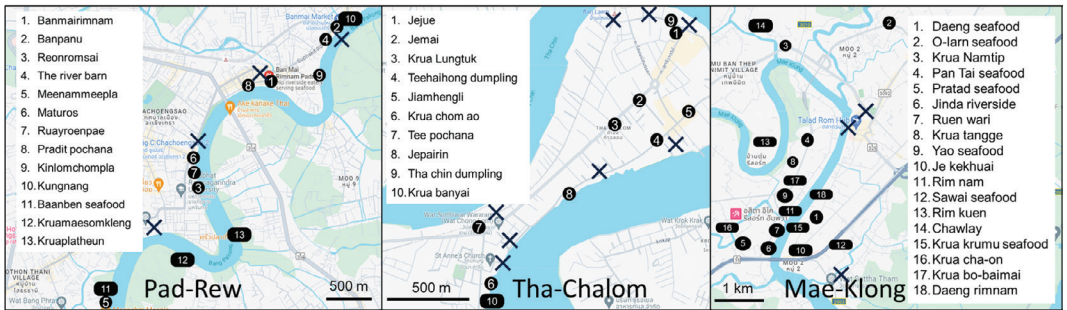


Figure 11: Location of restaurants in the three cities. Source: Authors.



Figure 12: Representable restaurants in Pad-Rew. Source: Authors.



Figure 13: Representable restaurants in Tha-Chalom. Source: Authors.



Figure 14: Representable restaurants in Mae-Klong. Source: Authors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the findings, the number of local restaurants compared to the total number of restaurants in the cities is rather low, as they amount to 2.4% in Pad-Rew, 6% in Mae-Klong and 7% in Tha-Chalong. However, these numbers may reflect the preferences of local consumers, assuming that they would like to have other types of dishes besides the local food they cook themselves. It also highlights the position of these representable restaurants as places for special occasions or to receive outsiders or tourists rather than serving daily local dishes.

From the survey, it can be seen that each city has its own characteristics and qualities of food places. In Pad-Rew, all thirteen representative restaurants are located along the Bang Pakong River and make full use of the scenery of the riverside landscape, while only five out of eighteen restaurants in Mae-Klong and three restaurants in Tha-Chalom are located along the riverside. The restaurants in Pad-Rew are more luxurious and on average larger and more expensive than the restaurants in the other cities.

To become enriched by creative experiences that reflect local resources and heritage, the concepts of creative tourism and the experience economy (Richards and Raymond 2000; Pine and Gilmore 2011) align well with gastronomic tourism, where tourists not only consume food but also engage with the culture, preparation and the stories surrounding food. The unique food offerings and local environments of each city offer opportunities for immersive and creative experiences that can be developed for each city's gastronomic experience.

Pad-Rew's scenic and fine dining potential

The restaurants in Pad-Rew, located along the Bang Pakong River, seem well positioned to enhance gastronomic tourism through the combination of riverside views and luxury dining experiences. As Pine and Gilmore suggest, the staging of experiences is key, and Pad-Rew's riverside location offers the ideal 'stage' for fine dining with a serene natural backdrop. This positioning aligned with special occasions, tourist excursions and group dining offers a creative experience that engages visitors beyond daily dining into a special and cultural event.

Tha-Chalom's walkable, casual and adventurous street food experience

Tha-Chalom's diverse range of dining options, including street food and seafood, provides tourists with a casual but adventurous experience. The setting aligns with active consumer participation, where tourists can explore local food venues within walking distance. The unique focus on seafood and the vibrant food kiosks enable tourists to interact directly with local cuisine, whether by trying fresh seafood or purchasing semi-processed goods like shrimp dumplings. Enhancing the city's signage could further encourage tourists to experience Tha-Chalom as a unique street food destination.

Mae-Klong's broad spectrum of culinary experiences

Mae-Klong offers a wide variety of dining options, from fine dining on the riverside to family-run shophouse restaurants, catering to different budgets and preferences. However, the distances between venues could make it

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difficult to create a seamless tourist experience. Possibly, the municipality office could provide guides or routes that take visitors to different culinary spots, creating an experience that meets tourist's preferences. The focus on seafood could be an opportunity for creativity and innovation in developing new dishes or processed products, which could further improve the city's gastronomic experience.

The data indicated that only a small percentage of restaurants are considered 'representable', which contradicts studies into the perception of tourists visiting these cities as renowned culinary hubs for fresh local produce (Muangmee et al. 2019; Pariwongkhuntorn et al. 2021; Puaksanit and Pasunon 2021). Possibly, the locals in these cities might prefer more diverse, everyday food options over fine dining or specialized regional cuisine. There may be a big difference between the types of dining experiences that local residents or tourists prefer. Locals often look for everyday meals that are affordable, familiar and convenient, while fine dining establishments cater to special occasions or outside visitors, making them less suitable for day-to-day dining.

Especially in Pad-Rew and Mae-Klong, the emphasis on fine dining might not fully reflect how locals experience the culinary atmosphere of the area. Tourists seeking authenticity might miss out on local food scene if the focus remains on higher-end establishments rather than everyday food experiences. The theme and concept of presenting gastronomic tourism must be well crafted with participation from the public. Moreover, gastronomic tourism in both cities should promote not only for the fine dining type, but also for street food, food markets and casual eateries where locals usually dine. Food tours can incorporate visits to popular local spots where tourists can sample traditional dishes that reflect the day-to-day culinary practices of the area.

In order to improve the local gastronomic experience for tourists, emphasis should be placed on the authenticity of local materials and resources, and the tastes. The following recommendations are proposed for the food service industry in these cities:

1. *Gastronomic branding*: The cities could use the findings of this research to develop a local certification programme that identifies restaurants, markets and producers who use or sell authentic, locally sourced ingredients. The cities should then create a city-wide gastronomic branding campaign that focuses on local ingredients with a catchy slogan and marketing materials to highlight the unique flavours and culinary identity of the region. This combined approach can enhance the city's appeal as a destination for authentic and sustainable dining experiences.
2. *Stimulate local sourcing*: Implement incentive schemes or programmes that reward restaurants and food establishments for including locally sourced agricultural, farming or fishery products into their menus. This can include not only Thai cuisine but also other culinary styles, such as Japanese or European, to cater to a wider tourist palette.
3. *Promote menu innovation*: Endorse programmes that encourage restaurants to develop new menus or food products utilizing locally sourced or produced ingredients. Menu competitions can serve as a valuable tool to attract attention of both the food service industry and consumers, thus encouraging creativity and innovation.
4. *Embrace 'farm-to-table' practices*: Adapt the 'farm-to-table' or 'farm-to-fork' concept to educate customers about the origins and sources of their food.

This transparency can enhance the dining experience and potentially lead to the development of new tourism activities, such as farm visits or cooking classes, that further connect tourists to the local food system.

5. *Develop gastronomic routes*: Create walking routes that connect key tourism spots and gastronomic locations such as restaurants, markets and food producers. In the meantime, the cities should improve their landscape such as pedestrian-friendly sidewalks and signages to provide information about the city's gastronomic offerings and walking routes.
6. *Harvest your own meal*: In addition to dining, tourists should have the opportunity to participate in tours where they can experience harvesting fresh produce from local farms, rivers or even the sea, creating a deeper connection with the food they eat. After the farm or harvesting trip, they can enjoy a meal made from the ingredients they collected, highlighting both freshness and nutrition.
7. *Pair food with cultural events*: Combine everyday food experiences with local cultural events or festivals, such as visits to historical sites, local performances, religious ceremonies or craft workshops, to create a more integrated and immersive tourism experience.
8. *River scenic eatery*: Cities should capitalize on their open spaces along the river by organizing food events or festivals that highlight local cuisine, connecting local food culture and scenic waterfront areas, creating memorable dining experiences.
9. *Eat like a local*: The concept involves shifting tourists' focus towards authentic, everyday local dining experiences through targeted marketing campaigns. By promoting non-tourist-centric restaurants and food stalls that use locally sourced ingredients, this initiative can encourage visitors to explore more traditional food options. In turn, this approach could generate a broader economic impact by supporting local businesses and producers, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive tourism experience.

By implementing these recommendations, the research aims to enable three cities to cultivate a more vibrant and authentic gastronomic scene, to strengthen their appeal as tourist destinations and create profit from gastronomic experiences. The research team presented their recommendations for gastronomic tourism development to local authorities and community audiences (Figure 15). These recommendations included specific plans for each city, encompassing both the promotion of local gastronomy and suggestions for improvements to the built environment and city layout. Meetings were held with the Chachoengsao City Municipality, the Tha-Chalom community, and the Samut Songkram City Municipality to ensure effective dissemination of the research findings.



Figure 15: Presentation to authorities. Source: Authors.

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The recommendations received positive feedback from local authorities and the public. Most of them were already aware of the importance of food and restaurants to the cities' tourism and economy. The authorities had a similar vision to promote food as a key to the city's tourism business, which they had already included in the development plan of each province (Samut Sakhon Provincial Administrative Organization 2022; Chachoengsao Provincial Office 2023; Samut Songkram Provincial Office 2023). However, these plans and policies mainly addressed the built environment and the promotion plan. Therefore, the implementation plan for gastronomic tourism still needed to be further developed with the participation of local restaurants and tour operators in the cities.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the current gastronomic landscape situation and potential for economic benefits, focusing on the gastronomic tourism in three riverside cities. This could be achieved by aligning gastronomic tourism with restaurant management and local food production to fully capture the economic benefits of visitors and to distribute the benefits locally across different parts of society. The results of this study can inform municipalities or authorities for their policies regarding food businesses and local tourism.

While this study provides a valuable overview of the gastronomic landscape in these three cities, it acknowledges certain limitations. First, the reliance on data retrieved from the Google Maps API introduces potential inaccuracies. Due to the vast number of locations involved, on-site verification of each entry was not feasible. Second, the research prioritized a broad examination of the city's overall gastronomic landscape. This focus meant that an in-depth analysis of individual restaurants or their food service providers did not fall within the scope of the study.

Limitation of this study can be seen in two aspects. (1) The study primarily relied on data retrieved from Google Maps to identify restaurant locations and types. This method may lead to inaccuracies, such as missing or outdated restaurant listings, as not all businesses may be listed or accurately represented on the platform. (2) The study did not collect qualitative insights from key stakeholders, such as interviews or surveys with restaurant owners, tourists or local residents. These perspectives could have enriched the analysis, offering a deeper understanding of the motivations behind restaurant choices and the challenges faced by local businesses.

Further research could delve deeper into the specific strengths of each city by conducting an in-depth analysis of their local food value and supply chains, especially the inside information from restaurants on their difficulties and limitations, and their perception and recommendations regarding gastronomic tourism. Additionally, research and development efforts could be directed towards creating unique local food experiences in these cities. This might involve working with local chefs and food producers to design novel dishes or food tours that showcase the cities' distinct culinary heritage. As a result, researchers may be able to provide a more comprehensive roadmap for maximizing the potential of gastronomic tourism in these riverside destinations.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was exempt from ethical review as no human participants were involved. The research solely relied on publicly available data and did not

involve any direct interaction with individuals or personal data collection. All procedures adhered to the ethical guidelines of Kasetsart University.

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