

THE ROLE OF TOUR GUIDES' STORYTELLING IN STRENGTHENING GASTRONOMY TOURISM ATTRACTIVENESS: EVIDENCE FROM CULINARY EXHIBITIONS IN JAKARTA'S GLODOK CHINATOWN

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ABSTRACT

Glodok Chinatown in Jakarta is a historic Chinese heritage district renowned for its culinary diversity and rich cultural legacy. Beyond serving as a destination for traditional Chinese-Indonesian cuisine, the area preserves culinary traditions, local ingredients, food philosophies, and historical narratives that reflect centuries of cultural acculturation. Despite this potential, tourism activities in Glodok are predominantly centered on food consumption, with limited interpretation of the cultural and historical values embedded in local gastronomy. Consequently, visitors often experience gastronomy tourism at a superficial level. This study investigates the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening the attractiveness of gastronomy tourism during culinary exhibitions in Jakarta's Glodok Chinatown. It examines how storytelling enhances visitors' understanding of culinary heritage, creates emotional engagement, and transforms culinary experiences into meaningful cultural encounters. By integrating historical narratives, food philosophies, preparation techniques, and local traditions, storytelling is expected to enrich visitor experiences beyond mere food tasting. A qualitative case study approach will be employed using thematic analysis. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with tour guides and visitors participating in culinary exhibitions in Glodok Chinatown. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of storytelling as an interpretive strategy for gastronomy tourism while providing practical recommendations for tour guides, event organizers, and destination managers. The study also enriches the literature on gastronomy tourism, heritage interpretation, and visitor experience by highlighting the strategic role of storytelling in enhancing the attractiveness and sustainability of heritage culinary destinations.

Keywords: gastronomy tourism; storytelling; tour guides; culinary exhibitions; heritage interpretation; visitor experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of global tourism has shifted travelers' preferences from conventional sightseeing toward more authentic, immersive, and experience-oriented forms of tourism. Among these emerging trends, gastronomy tourism has attracted increasing scholarly and practical attention because it offers visitors opportunities to experience local culture through food, culinary traditions, and heritage. Unlike conventional culinary tourism, gastronomy tourism extends beyond food consumption by incorporating historical narratives, cultural values, local traditions, cooking techniques, ingredients, food philosophy, etiquette, and social practices that collectively shape visitors' understanding of a destination. Consequently, gastronomy has become an essential component of cultural heritage tourism and a strategic instrument for promoting sustainable destination development.

Indonesia possesses one of the world's richest gastronomic heritages, reflecting centuries of cultural exchanges among indigenous communities and foreign civilizations. As a multicultural nation, Indonesian cuisine has evolved through continuous interactions with Chinese, Arab, Indian, Portuguese, and Dutch cultures, creating distinctive culinary traditions across the archipelago. One of the most representative destinations of this cultural acculturation is Glodok Chinatown, the oldest Chinese settlement in Jakarta. Established during the colonial era as the commercial center of the Chinese community, Glodok continues to preserve its historical identity through traditional markets, Chinese temples, herbal medicine shops, ritual supply stores, antique cookware, and a wide variety of Chinese-Indonesian culinary products.

The culinary heritage of Glodok reflects centuries of cultural adaptation between Chinese and Indonesian communities. Visitors encounter not only traditional dishes but also unique ingredients, such

as sea cucumber, herbal products, seasonal vegetables, and symbolic fruits, many of which embody philosophical meanings rooted in Chinese traditions. These culinary products represent more than gastronomic commodities; they function as cultural artifacts that preserve collective memory, identity, and historical continuity. Consequently, Glodok possesses substantial potential to be developed as a gastronomy tourism destination rather than merely a culinary attraction.

Despite this potential, tourism activities in Glodok remain predominantly centered on food consumption. Most visitors travel to the area to taste popular dishes or purchase traditional foods without gaining a comprehensive understanding of the cultural meanings embedded within them. As a result, visitor experiences tend to remain superficial, focusing primarily on sensory satisfaction rather than cultural learning. This situation contrasts with the concept of gastronomy tourism, which emphasizes holistic experiences integrating culinary knowledge, cultural interpretation, and heritage appreciation.

According to Dewi Turgarini and colleagues, gastronomy encompasses nine interconnected components, including local ingredients, cooking techniques, food presentation, nutritional values, taste, etiquette, food philosophy, historical traditions, and cultural experiences. Similarly, Soeroso and Dewi Turgarini distinguish gastronomy from culinary tourism by emphasizing that gastronomy represents a multidisciplinary body of knowledge surrounding food rather than the mere act of eating. Therefore, successful gastronomy tourism requires effective interpretation capable of communicating these multiple dimensions to visitors.

Within this context, storytelling has emerged as a powerful interpretive approach for enhancing visitor experiences. Storytelling enables visitors to understand the historical origins, symbolic meanings, preparation methods, cultural values, and social significance of local cuisine through engaging narratives. Rather than simply providing factual information, storytelling creates emotional connections between visitors and destinations, encouraging deeper cultural appreciation and memorable tourism experiences. Previous tourism studies have demonstrated that storytelling enhances destination authenticity, visitor engagement, emotional attachment, and overall satisfaction while contributing to heritage conservation and destination branding.

The effectiveness of storytelling largely depends on the competence of tour guides, who serve not only as information providers but also as cultural interpreters and experience facilitators. In gastronomy tourism settings, tour guides play a critical role in transforming culinary activities into meaningful cultural experiences by connecting visitors with the historical and cultural narratives embedded in local food. During culinary exhibitions, where diverse traditional foods are presented within a cultural context, storytelling becomes even more essential in communicating the intangible heritage associated with each culinary product. Without effective storytelling, gastronomy tourism risks becoming merely a food consumption activity with limited educational and cultural value.

Although previous studies have extensively examined gastronomy tourism, culinary heritage, destination attractiveness, and visitor experiences, relatively little attention has been devoted to the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening gastronomy tourism attractiveness, particularly within the context of culinary exhibitions hosted in historic ethnic districts such as Glodok Chinatown. Existing studies have primarily focused on food quality, destination image, tourist satisfaction, or culinary authenticity, while the interpretive role of storytelling remains underexplored. This research gap

indicates the need to investigate how storytelling contributes to enriching gastronomy tourism experiences and enhancing the attractiveness of heritage culinary destinations.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening gastronomy tourism attractiveness during culinary exhibitions in Jakarta's Glodok Chinatown. Specifically, the study explores how storytelling enhances visitors' cultural understanding, emotional engagement, and appreciation of culinary heritage while contributing to more interactive, meaningful, and memorable tourism experiences. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on gastronomy tourism, heritage interpretation, and tour guiding, while providing practical recommendations for tour guides, event organizers, and destination managers seeking to develop sustainable and culturally immersive gastronomy tourism experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gastronomy tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of cultural tourism, offering visitors opportunities to experience local culture through food and culinary traditions. Unlike culinary tourism, which primarily emphasizes food consumption, gastronomy tourism provides a holistic experience that integrates culinary practices with history, culture, identity, local knowledge, and social values. Consequently, gastronomy tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach to preserving cultural heritage while enhancing destination competitiveness and visitor experience.



Figure 1. Gastronomy Tourism
Source: Gastronomy Theory by Soeroso and Turgarini (2020).

According to Soeroso and Turgarini (2020), gastronomy consists of nine interconnected components that collectively shape a comprehensive gastronomic experience: cooking practices, local ingredients, tasting experiences, food presentation, learning and food research, unique culinary experiences, nutritional knowledge, philosophy, history, traditions and social values, as well as ethics and etiquette. These components distinguish gastronomy tourism from conventional culinary tourism by emphasizing educational, cultural, and experiential dimensions rather than merely food consumption. Therefore, gastronomy tourism requires effective interpretation capable of communicating the intangible cultural values embedded in local cuisine. Food should not merely be viewed as a tourism product but also as a medium through which visitors understand the historical evolution, cultural identity, and traditions of a destination.

Within this context, tour guides play a pivotal role in facilitating meaningful visitor experiences. Christopher (2016) describes tour guides as professionals who provide information and facilitate interactions between tourists and tourism attractions. Similarly, the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) defines a tour guide as a qualified individual who interprets the cultural and

natural heritage of a destination in a language understood by visitors and whose competence is officially recognized by relevant authorities. These definitions indicate that tour guides function not only as providers of factual information but also as cultural interpreters capable of translating heritage into meaningful visitor experiences. In gastronomy tourism, tour guides are expected to explain the historical origins of traditional dishes, local ingredients, cooking techniques, symbolic meanings, food philosophy, etiquette, and the cultural values associated with culinary heritage. Consequently, the competence of tour guides significantly influences visitors' understanding, satisfaction, and perception of destination attractiveness.

One of the most effective interpretive approaches employed by tour guides is storytelling. Woodside (2010) defines storytelling as a communication process that connects audiences with messages through narratives consisting of plots, characters, and meaningful resolutions capable of generating emotional engagement. In tourism, storytelling integrates factual information with narrative elements to create memorable visitor experiences while simultaneously strengthening destination identity. Pasaribu et al. (2022) argue that tourism storytelling combines historical facts, cultural values, and narrative techniques to enhance visitors' understanding of destinations and promote their unique characteristics. Likewise, Pachucki et al. (2022) emphasize that storytelling has become an essential component of destination marketing because it influences tourists' perceptions before, during, and after their travel experiences. Rather than simply presenting factual information, storytelling enables visitors to establish emotional connections with destinations through authentic narratives, thereby enriching their overall tourism experience.

The application of storytelling is particularly relevant in gastronomy tourism because food inherently embodies cultural meanings beyond its sensory attributes. Narratives concerning the origins of traditional dishes, symbolic ingredients, preparation techniques, historical trade routes, local customs, festivals, and food philosophies transform culinary activities into immersive cultural experiences. Storytelling therefore bridges the gap between tangible culinary products and the intangible cultural heritage they represent. Through engaging narratives, visitors gain a deeper appreciation of the social, historical, and cultural contexts surrounding local cuisine, resulting in stronger emotional attachment and more memorable tourism experiences.

This perspective is particularly applicable to Glodok Chinatown, one of Jakarta's oldest Chinese heritage districts and a prominent culinary destination. Glodok preserves centuries of Chinese-Indonesian cultural acculturation reflected in its traditional markets, temples, herbal medicine shops, ritual supply stores, historic trading activities, and diverse culinary products. Many foods sold in the area embody philosophical meanings, historical narratives, and cultural symbolism inherited across generations. Nevertheless, despite its considerable gastronomic potential, visitor activities in Glodok remain predominantly oriented toward food consumption. Most tourists visit the area to taste popular dishes or purchase traditional food products without obtaining comprehensive interpretations of their historical, philosophical, and cultural significance. Consequently, the tourism experience often remains superficial and does not fully reflect the principles of gastronomy tourism.

Culinary exhibitions organized within Glodok provide an ideal setting for integrating storytelling into gastronomy tourism experiences. During these events, tour guides can interpret culinary heritage by explaining the historical origins of longevity noodles, the symbolism of festive foods during Chinese celebrations such as Cap Go Meh, traditional cooking methods, and the cultural values embedded in local culinary practices. Such narratives enable visitors to experience gastronomy beyond tasting food

by fostering cultural understanding, emotional engagement, and heritage appreciation. Storytelling therefore has the potential to strengthen destination attractiveness while simultaneously supporting cultural preservation and sustainable tourism development.

Although previous studies have extensively examined gastronomy tourism, culinary heritage, destination attractiveness, tourist satisfaction, authenticity, and gastronomic potential, relatively limited attention has been devoted to investigating the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening gastronomy tourism attractiveness, particularly within the context of culinary exhibitions in heritage destinations. Existing studies conducted in Glodok have primarily explored culinary potential, gastronomic heritage documentation based on the nine gastronomy components, and destination attractiveness. Meanwhile, research concerning tour guides has focused on professional competencies, tourism education, geotourism interpretation, promotional roles, and gastronomy guiding competencies. Furthermore, storytelling practices implemented by tour guides frequently remain descriptive and informational, lacking interactive, dramatic, and emotionally engaging narrative structures capable of creating memorable visitor experiences. This research gap highlights the need to investigate how storytelling strategies employed by tour guides can enhance gastronomy tourism attractiveness by integrating heritage interpretation, visitor engagement, and emotional connection within culinary exhibitions.

Accordingly, this study examines the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening gastronomy tourism attractiveness during culinary exhibitions in Jakarta's Glodok Chinatown. By integrating the concepts of gastronomy tourism, heritage interpretation, storytelling, and visitor experience, this study contributes to the growing literature on gastronomy tourism while providing practical recommendations for tour guides, event organizers, and destination managers seeking to develop more meaningful, interactive, and emotionally engaging gastronomic experiences.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the role of tour guides' storytelling in strengthening gastronomy tourism attractiveness during culinary exhibitions in Jakarta's Glodok Chinatown. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena, particularly the ways in which storytelling is constructed, communicated, and experienced by both tour guides and visitors. The case study design was considered appropriate as it facilitates a comprehensive examination of storytelling practices within their real-life context while capturing the interactions among tour guides, tourists, and tourism stakeholders.

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. The primary data consisted of (1) gastronomy tour routes and heritage culinary attractions included in the guided tours, (2) the Interpretation Competency Unit of the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards, (3) tour guiding materials and interpretive narratives used during gastronomy tours, and (4) supporting documents, photographs, promotional materials, and other visual resources related to culinary exhibitions and heritage tourism in Glodok Chinatown.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with tour guides responsible for gastronomy tours, tourists participating in the culinary tours, and representatives of tour operators, including Jakarta

Good Guide and Walkindies, which regularly organize gastronomy tours in Glodok Chinatown. Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of sixteen open-ended questions designed to explore storytelling practices, narrative construction, visitor engagement, emotional connection, and the perceived contribution of storytelling to gastronomy tourism attractiveness. The interview protocol was developed using the 5W+1H framework (what, who, where, when, why, and how) to ensure comprehensive exploration of the research objectives.

Participant observation was conducted by joining the complete gastronomy tour experience organized by Jakarta Good Guide and Walkindies during culinary exhibitions in Glodok Chinatown. Throughout the tours, the researcher observed how tour guides delivered storytelling, interpreted culinary heritage, interacted with visitors, and communicated the historical, philosophical, and cultural meanings embedded in local cuisine. Field notes were recorded to document narrative techniques, visitor responses, interaction patterns, and interpretive practices occurring during the guided experience.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following an iterative coding process. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were systematically coded to identify recurring themes related to storytelling strategies, heritage interpretation, visitor engagement, emotional attachment, and gastronomy tourism attractiveness. Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary sources was employed to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the findings. This analytical approach enabled the identification of key storytelling practices that contribute to strengthening visitors' gastronomic experiences and the overall attractiveness of Glodok Chinatown as a heritage gastronomy tourism destination.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of interviews with tour guides and visitors at culinary exhibitions in Glodok Chinatown indicates that storytelling functions as a critical interpretive mechanism that links sensory food experiences to broader historical and cultural contexts. Storytelling delivered by guides typically combined four complementary elements: historical context (origins and migratory histories), food philosophy and symbolism, preparation techniques and demonstrations, and personal/local anecdotes. These narrative components enhanced visitors' cognitive understanding of culinary heritage and fostered emotional engagement, thereby transforming food consumption into a culturally meaningful encounter rather than a solely gustatory event.

Theme 1 Historical context enriches culinary meaning

Guides who embedded dishes within Glodok's migratory, trade, and acculturation narratives enabled visitors to perceive food as cultural evidence rather than mere taste. Visitors reported that historical framing linking recipes to Chinese-Indonesian migration, trade routes, or specific historic events provided temporal depth and situated dishes within processes of cultural blending. This finding is consistent with heritage interpretation theory, which contends that situating artefacts in historical narratives increases their interpretive value. In practical terms, historical storytelling reframes dishes as tangible records of sociocultural interaction, increasing visitor appreciation for the place's intangible heritage.

Theme 2 Food philosophy and symbolism foster emotional engagement

Explanations of symbolic meanings (for example, ingredient choices during festivals, auspicious dishes, or culinary norms tied to family rituals) provoked reflection and interpersonal discussion among

visitors. Many participants described feelings of respect, nostalgia, or curiosity when guides explained why particular foods are eaten during certain ceremonies or how food practices signal family or community identity. These emotional responses align with literature on memorable tourism experiences: narratives that connect personal values and cultural meanings are more likely to produce lasting impressions and pro-conservation attitudes. Thus, food-focused storytelling contributes to sustainable heritage outcomes by encouraging affective ties that support preservation.

Theme 3 Demonstrations of technique increase perceived authenticity

When guides coupled narrative with sensory demonstrations showing preparation steps, highlighting ingredient textures and aromas, or staging live cooking segments visitors reported heightened perceptions of authenticity and a stronger sense of proximity to culinary practices. Demonstrations provided tangible evidence that corroborated narrative claims and engaged multiple senses, reinforcing learning and retention. This supports research on perceived authenticity in gastronomy tourism, indicating that practical demonstrations help validate heritage claims and reduce the sense that culinary offerings are staged or commodified.

Theme 4 Guide style and interpretive skill determine storytelling effectiveness

Not all storytelling was equally effective. Analysis revealed a spectrum in guide performance: some used interactive, empathetic techniques (open questions, humor, contextualized anecdotes) that elicited visitor participation, while others delivered information in a didactic, fact-heavy manner that tended to be less engaging. Visitors consistently preferred guides who tailored language to the audience, encouraged questions, and linked narratives to visitors' own experiences. This underscores the pivotal role of interpretive skills beyond factual knowledge in shaping visitor experience. Training in narrative structure, audience-centered delivery, and engagement techniques is therefore essential.

Theme 5 Operational constraints and limits to interpretation

Several practical barriers constrained storytelling's potential. High visitor density, limited time per exhibit, inconsistent guide knowledge, and lack of interpretive materials (visual panels, leaflets, digital resources) reduced opportunities for in-depth narrative exchange. Under these conditions, storytelling risked becoming cursory, and visitors' experiences defaulted to surface-level tasting. These operational limitations indicate that storytelling must be embedded in event design and visitor-flow management to be effective; otherwise, the interpretive promise of culinary exhibitions remains underrealized.

Relation to existing theory and literature

The findings corroborate and extend scholarship in gastronomy tourism and heritage interpretation. They affirm that narrative interpretation increases both cognitive learning and affective engagement, thereby enhancing perceived authenticity and memorability. Moreover, this study contributes empirical evidence linking interpretive storytelling to potential sustainability outcomes: by deepening visitors' cultural understanding and emotional attachment, storytelling may encourage behaviors that support heritage conservation. The study also highlights the importance of guide performance and event design variables that are frequently noted in tourism studies but are here shown to be critical in converting culinary festivals into meaningful heritage encounters.

The present study demonstrates that storytelling by tour guides significantly enhances the interpretive depth of gastronomy tourism experiences in Glodok Chinatown, shifting visitor encounters from mere consumption toward culturally meaningful engagement. By integrating historical context, food philosophies, preparation techniques, and personal anecdotes, guides translate sensory encounters into narratives that situate dishes within longer processes of migration, acculturation, and community

memory. This narrative framing aligns with principles of heritage interpretation, suggesting that when food is presented as a cultural artefact rich with temporal and social referents visitors are more likely to perceive it as an embodiment of intangible heritage rather than a commodity.

One notable contribution of this study is the clear linkage between narrative elements and visitor responses. Historical contextualization provided temporal depth and positioned culinary practices as outcomes of sociocultural exchange, reinforcing existing literature that situates interpretation as essential to heritage value construction. Similarly, the articulation of food philosophies symbolism, ritual associations, and familial meanings elicited emotional responses such as nostalgia and respect, which are key components of memorable tourism experiences. These affective responses matter because they can motivate pro-conservation attitudes; when tourists feel emotionally connected to cultural practices, they are more likely to support their preservation.

The data also reveal that combining storytelling with sensory demonstrations amplifies perceived authenticity. Demonstrations served as corroborative evidence for narratives, engaging multiple senses and providing tangible proof of traditional techniques. This finding complements prior research on perceived authenticity in culinary tourism, which argues that hands-on or observational exposure to practice reinforces visitors' beliefs in the genuineness of cultural expressions. It suggests that event organizers should consider integrating micro-demonstrations into narrative programs to enhance both learning and authenticity.

However, the study highlights that the effectiveness of storytelling depends heavily on guide competence and event design. Variability in delivery ranging from interactive, audience-centered storytelling to dry, information-heavy presentations produced markedly different visitor experiences. Guides who used rhetorical questions, local anecdotes, and adaptive language achieved greater engagement than those who relied solely on factual exposition. This underscores the importance of interpretive training: knowledge of history or recipes is necessary but not sufficient; guides require narrative skills, audience awareness, and techniques for eliciting participation.

Operational constraints also limited the potential impact of storytelling. High visitor density, short encounter durations, and insufficient interpretive materials frequently truncated narrative exchanges, causing stories to become superficial. These practical barriers indicate that storytelling must be embedded in the logistical planning of culinary exhibitions. Without adjustments to visitor flow, time allocation, and material supports, the interpretive promise of storytelling will remain only partially realized.

The study's findings have pragmatic implications. For tour guides, adopting structured yet flexible narrative frameworks that weave historical background, symbolic meaning, and process descriptions can help convert tastings into educational encounters. For organizers and destination managers, investing in interpretive toolkits visual panels, digital content linked via QR codes, scheduled demonstrations, and small-group formats will create conditions conducive to meaningful storytelling. Such investments can also support sustainability goals by promoting culturally informed visitor behavior and local community involvement.

Limitations of the current study warrant acknowledgement. The qualitative case-study design focuses on specific culinary exhibitions in Glodok and relies on self-reported data, which may limit the transferability of results. Future research should test the causal effects of different storytelling formats using experimental or mixed-methods designs, measure long-term impacts on visitor attitudes and behaviors, and compare interpretive strategies across diverse culinary heritage settings.

In sum, storytelling emerges as a strategic interpretive tool that can enhance the attractiveness and sustainability of gastronomy tourism in Glodok Chinatown. Realizing this potential requires not only skilled narrators but also event designs and management practices that prioritize narrative exchange.

Integrating storytelling into gastronomy events thus offers a pathway to deepen cultural appreciation, reinforce authenticity, and support heritage preservation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that storytelling by tour guides plays a decisive role in strengthening the attractiveness of gastronomy tourism in Glodok Chinatown by transforming food consumption into culturally meaningful encounters. Narratives that combine historical context, food philosophy, preparation techniques, and personal anecdotes enhance visitors' cognitive understanding and emotional engagement, increase perceived authenticity, and promote memorable experiences. The effectiveness of storytelling depends on guides' interpretive skills and on event design: without adequate training, time allocation, visitor-flow management, and supporting interpretive materials, storytelling risks remaining superficial.

Practically, the findings recommend investing in guide training for narrative delivery, integrating micro-demonstrations and interpretive aids (e.g., panels, leaflets, QR-linked content), and designing exhibition logistics that enable sustained narrative exchange. Such measures can deepen visitor appreciation of culinary heritage and support sustainable heritage outcomes by encouraging pro-conservation attitudes and responsible tourist behavior.

Limitations of this qualitative case study its focus on selected culinary exhibitions in Glodok and reliance on self-reported data temper the generalizability of conclusions. Future research should employ mixed-methods or experimental designs to measure the causal impact of different storytelling formats, assess long-term effects on visitor behavior, and test transferability across other culinary heritage sites.

Overall, embedding well-crafted storytelling within gastronomy events offers a practical and strategic pathway to enhance both the interpretive value and sustainability of culinary heritage destinations like Glodok Chinatown.

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