

Role of Ethnic and Traditional Food in Development of Tourism in Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Ethnic and traditional foods in Jaffna serve as a vital expression of intangible cultural heritage, offering significant potential to establish the region as a unique culinary tourism destination in Sri Lanka. This study aims to explore how these culinary traditions can be preserved, enhanced, and promoted to attract culinary tourists, thereby contributing to local economic development and cultural preservation. The objectives focus on identifying indigenous foods and ingredients, analyzing their preparation and preservation methods, and developing marketing and product strategies while evaluating the challenges and opportunities in this context. Employing a qualitative research methodology rooted in interpretivism and content analysis, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews and observations targeting stakeholders such as food producers, hospitality professionals, and local community members. The findings revealed that Jaffna's rich culinary heritage, centered around ingredients like palmyra, seafood, and traditional preservation techniques, can be elevated through strategic branding, digital marketing, and stakeholder collaboration. However, key challenges include infrastructural limitations, limited awareness, and the risk of losing authenticity through commercialization. The study highlights that leveraging the culinary identity of Jaffna, while ensuring cultural sensitivity and community involvement, can result in sustainable tourism development. Recommendations emphasise the need for partnerships between the public and private sectors, capacity building for local food entrepreneurs, and promoting authentic food experiences. The research underscores the importance of culinary tourism not only as a tool for economic upliftment but also as a means to safeguard cultural heritage, positioning Jaffna as a compelling destination for culturally curious travelers.

Keywords: culinary tourism, ethnic foods, intangible cultural heritage, traditional foods in Jaffna