Original Article

Exploration of Gastronomic History and Culinary Potential of Bitung City as a Tourism Attraction

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Abstract:
Bitung City in North Sulawesi has a rich history and culinary culture that is interesting to be explored as a tourist attraction. This research aims to explore the gastronomic history and culinary potential of Bitung City through a literature study approach. The method used was qualitative research by conducting a literature review of various relevant sources such as books, journal articles, and historical documents. The results of the study show that Bitung City has a distinctive culinary heritage, rooted in a combination of local and external cultural influences such as Europe and China due to the history of trade in the region. Typical foods such as Shasibi made from raw tuna fish reflect Bitung's characteristics as a coastal city. There are also a variety of other cuisines with local ingredients and distinctive traditional cooking techniques. Bitung's rich gastronomic history and culinary uniqueness have great potential to be developed as a tourist attraction that attracts tourists, while preserving culinary culture as a regional identity. Synergy is needed from the government, industry players, and the community in introducing and promoting Bitung culinary. This research concludes the importance of in-depth exploration of gastronomic history and the development of culinary tourism based on regional local wealth.

Keywords: culture, exploration, gastronomy, Bitung City, culinary heritage, tourism

Introduction

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world with more than 17,000 islands spread from Sabang to Merauke. Its strategic geographical position has put Indonesia at the crossroads of world trade since ancient times (Suroyo, 2019). This condition allows for cultural interaction and acculturation from various nations, which has enriched the culinary treasures of the archipelago (Alamsyah, 2008). One region in Indonesia that has
a unique history and culture is Bitung City in North Sulawesi. As a port city and fishing industry, Bitung has a strategic position in international trade routes (Sondakh et al., 2019). Bitung’s long history as one of the oldest cities in North Sulawesi, with historical records dating back to the Dutch colonial era, has left interesting traces on cultural development including in terms of culinary (Parenkuan, 2016). Gastronomy is one approach to understanding the identity and culture of a region through food. According to Ketaren (2017), gastronomy is not only about the food itself, but also includes the history, culture, geographical landscape and cooking methods that characterise a region. Through this perspective, we can see how local cuisines are formed and evolve as history unfolds and people interact with their environment.

The potential of gastronomy as a tourist attraction has been increasingly recognised in recent decades. Culinary tourism not only offers the experience of tasting typical dishes, but also provides an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the local community (Hall & Sharples, 2003). The development of gastronomy tourism can be a strategy to promote destinations, support local economies, while preserving culinary cultural heritage (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Silkes et al., 2013). Several previous studies have explored the relationship between gastronomy and tourism in different countries. In Spain, Cànoves et al. (2016) found that gastronomy tourism plays an important role in revitalising the countryside and preserving local culinary heritage. Meanwhile, research by Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2016) in Finland showed that authentic gastronomic experiences are the main motivation for tourists in choosing a tourist destination. However, research on the potential of gastronomy as a tourist attraction in Indonesia, especially in Bitung City, is still limited. In fact, Bitung has a distinctive and diverse culinary wealth, formed from a blend of local and foreign cultural influences throughout its history. One of Bitung’s iconic dishes is Shasibi, a raw tuna-based dish that reflects Bitung’s characteristics as a coastal city (Kalangi et al., 2019).

An exploration of Bitung City’s gastronomic history is necessary to understand the cultural roots and identity of local cuisine. Research by Sari et al. (2020) revealed that Bitung’s traditional cuisines, such as Chutoro (mackerel soup) and Patola (young papaya dish), have historical and philosophical values that are important to preserve. However, the study has not examined in depth the relationship between gastronomic history and the potential for culinary tourism development. This research aims to explore the gastronomic history of Bitung City and analyse its potential as a tourist attraction. Through a qualitative approach with a literature study method, this research will explore information from various sources such as books, journal articles, and historical documents to reconstruct Bitung's culinary journey over time. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of gastronomic tourism in Bitung City. By understanding the history and uniqueness of local cuisine, a more targeted promotional strategy can be formulated to attract tourists. In addition, this research can also be the first step in efforts to preserve culinary cultural heritage as a regional identity. In the next section, the literature review will further discuss the concept of gastronomy, the relationship between gastronomy and tourism, and an overview of the history and culinary culture of Bitung City. The research method will be explained in detail, followed by the results and discussion that analyses the findings from the literature review. Conclusions and recommendations will be provided at the end. By exploring the gastronomic history of Bitung City, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the local culinary wealth and its potential as a
tourist attraction. This is important in the effort to develop sustainable tourism, which not only focuses on economic growth, but also pays attention to cultural and environmental preservation.

**Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method, which will explore the gastronomic history of Bitung City and its potential as a driver of local tourism. A qualitative approach was chosen as it is suitable for exploring a deep understanding of complex social phenomena, such as history, culture and gastronomy (Creswell, 2018). Literature review was chosen as a method to synthesise and analyse various sources of information related to the research topic. This research will use a narrative literature review design that is comprehensive and critical (Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive overview of Bitung City’s gastronomic history and its potential to drive local tourism, as well as critically analyse the findings from various relevant literature sources. The literature search will be conducted systematically using various electronic databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, JSTOR, and other relevant databases. Keywords to be used in the search include "gastronomy history", "culinary culture", "gastronomy tourism", "Bitung City", and other appropriate combinations. In addition, other literature sources such as books, research reports, journal articles, and other relevant sources will also be considered for inclusion in the literature review.

Inclusion criteria will be used to ensure that the selected literature is relevant to the research topic. The criteria encompass literature that explores the history, culture, and gastronomy of Bitung City or its surrounding areas. Additionally, it includes literature that examines the relationship between gastronomy and tourism, or the potential of gastronomy as a driver of tourism. Only literature published within a relevant timeframe, such as the last 10-15 years, will be considered, except for sources that are historically significant. Furthermore, the literature must be written in either Indonesian or English. Exclusion criteria will be used to eliminate literature that is not relevant or does not meet certain quality standards. This includes literature that only discusses aspects of gastronomy or tourism in general without relating it to Bitung City or its local context. Additionally, literature that did not employ valid research methods or reliable data sources will be excluded. Furthermore, literature that lacks clear relevance to the research topic will also be omitted. After collecting relevant literature, data analysis will be carried out through several stages. The first stage, Reading and Screening, involves critically reading and screening the collected literature to ensure its relevance to the research topic. Any literature that is not relevant or does not fulfill the inclusion criteria will be excluded from further analysis.

The second stage, Coding and Categorisation, entails an in-depth analysis of the remaining literature using coding and categorisation techniques. Coding involves identifying key concepts, themes, and important information related to the research topic. Categories will be formed based on patterns that emerge from the literature data.

The third stage, Synthesis and Interpretation, involves synthesising and critically interpreting the findings from the literature. This synthesis will identify similarities, differences, and gaps in the existing literature. Interpretation will involve an in-depth analysis of the meaning and implications of the findings in the context of Bitung City’s gastronomic history and its potential as a local tourism driver. The fourth stage, Reporting and Presentation of Results, will involve presenting the results of the
literature analysis in a comprehensive written report. The report will include an introduction, literature review, methodology, main findings, discussion, and conclusion. The research results may also be presented in seminars, conferences, or journal publications to share the findings with the wider academic community. Ethical considerations must be taken into account, even though this study uses the literature review method. These considerations include avoiding plagiarism by accurately and completely citing sources, maintaining objectivity and impartiality in presenting and interpreting findings, respecting copyright and limiting the use of copyrighted material according to applicable regulations, and maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive or confidential information, if any, in the analysed literature.

Although the literature review method can provide a comprehensive overview of the research topic, there are some limitations that need to be considered. One limitation is the potential for limited access to relevant literature, particularly local literature or literature that is not widely published. Additionally, there is the possibility of bias in the selection and interpretation of literature by the researcher. Another limitation is the inability to collect primary data or make direct observations in the field. Furthermore, the method may have limitations in capturing local nuances and contexts that may not be fully covered in the existing literature. To overcome these limitations, the researcher will endeavour to access the widest possible literature, maintain objectivity in the analysis, and consider additional relevant sources of information, such as expert interviews or field visits where possible. By using a systematic and critical literature review approach, this research is expected to make an important contribution to understanding Bitung City's gastronomic history and its potential as a driver of local tourism, as well as opening up opportunities for further research in the future.

Results
Gastronomic History of Bitung City

Based on the literature review conducted, it was found that the gastronomic history of Bitung City is closely related to the historical, geographical, and cultural background of the local community. Some of the main findings related to the gastronomic history of Bitung City will be discussed in more depth in this sub-chapter. One of the main factors that shaped Bitung City's gastronomy is its maritime culture and strategic geographical location on the north coast of North Sulawesi. As a port city, Bitung has been a bustling center for trade and sea transportation since ancient times. This has opened up opportunities for cultural exchange and culinary influences from various regions that have stopped by Bitung. According to a journal article published by Sam Ratulangi University in Manado, the geographical location of Bitung City on the edge of the sea makes local people very familiar with maritime culture and they utilize marine resources as the main food source (Pongoh et al., 2017). Processed fish and other marine products characterize Bitung's cuisine, such as shasibi (sliced raw tuna with special spices), grilled fish, and various types of fish soup. Additionally, the influence of maritime culture is reflected in the food processing and preservation techniques developed by the Bitung community. For example, the technique of smoking fish to preserve it, known as ikan tara or ikan asar (Mantiri et al., 2021), allows the Bitung community to store fish for a longer period of time and use it as food stock during certain seasons.

As a harbor city bustling with traders and sailors from various regions, Bitung is a
place of rich cultural mixing, which has significantly influenced the city's gastronomic development. A book written by Brata and Netra (2017) reveals that Bitung's cuisine is the result of cultural acculturation from various ethnic groups that migrated and settled in the region. The strong influence of Minahasa culture can be found in the use of ingredients such as fish, vegetables, and special spices such as basil leaves, turmeric leaves, and cayenne pepper. Additionally, influences from Bugis, Makassarese, Javanese, and Chinese cultures have introduced their own flavors and cooking techniques to Bitung. A thesis by a student of Sam Ratulangi University in Manado explains that one of Bitung's specialties reflecting this mix of cultures is bagea cake (Wuisang, 2016). This cake is an adaptation of a traditional Chinese cake combined with local ingredients such as sweet potato and coconut milk. Such cultural acculturation enriches Bitung's gastronomic treasures and creates unique flavors not found in other regions.

In addition to local cultural influences, Bitung City's gastronomy has been significantly influenced by the ethnic Chinese who have been living in the region for a long time. A journal article published by Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku reveals that the ethnic Chinese in Bitung brought their culinary traditions and blended them with local culture (Soselisa et al., 2022). One of the popular Chinese culinary heritages in Bitung is bakso noodles. Originally from China, meatballs have been adapted to local flavors using fish and Bitung spices. Other culinary delights include sponge cake, spring rolls, and various types of pastries that reflect Chinese influences. A research report by the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy states that the existence of the Chinatown area in Bitung helped introduce and preserve Chinese culinary heritage (Kemenparekraf, 2021). This area serves as a culinary center offering a variety of Chinese dishes that have been assimilated with local flavors.

In addition to cultural and ethnic factors, religion and beliefs have also shaped the history of gastronomy in Bitung City. According to a book written by Paulus and Liesje (2019), most of the people of Bitung embrace Protestant Christianity and Catholicism, with a small percentage embracing Islam and local beliefs. The influence of Protestant Christianity and Catholicism is reflected in some culinary traditions adapted from European culture, such as the use of spices and certain cooking techniques. There are also specialties associated with religious celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter cakes.

Potential of Gastronomy as a Driver of Local Tourism

Based on the literature review conducted, Bitung City's gastronomy has great potential to be a driver of local tourism. Some of the key findings related to this potential will be discussed in more depth in this sub-section. The culinary uniqueness and richness of Bitung City are significant assets in promoting local tourism. Bitung's gastronomy, as a result of the fusion of various cultures and ethnicities, offers a diverse range of flavors and cooking techniques. This uniqueness can attract tourists seeking authentic and varied culinary experiences. In addition to its culinary uniqueness and richness, Bitung City's gastronomy has the potential to be integrated into the wider tourism experience. This integration can enhance the attractiveness of the tourist destination and provide added value for tourists. According to a study conducted by Pongoh et al. (2017), one strategy is to develop gastronomic tourism packages that combine visits to traditional food production sites, tasting local specialties, and learning about the history and culture behind the cuisine. For instance, tourists can visit a factory where tara fish or ikan asar is made, observe the processing, and taste the smoked fish. Additionally, a journal article published by Sam Ratulangi University in Manado

Mentions that the Bitung City government can develop culinary events such as food festivals or cooking competitions involving local communities (Mantiri et al., 2021). These activities can attract tourists to engage directly in the local culinary culture and provide a more authentic experience.

The development of gastronomy as a driver of local tourism also opens up economic opportunities and community empowerment for the people of Bitung City. This aligns with one of the main objectives of tourism development, which is to improve the welfare of local communities. A research report published by the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy states that by utilizing local culinary wealth as a tourist attraction, the community can be involved in culinary businesses such as restaurants, food stalls, or the sale of typical food products (Kemenparekraf, 2021). This can create new jobs and increase the income of the local community. Moreover, a thesis written by a student of Sam Ratulangi University in Manado states that community empowerment can also be carried out through training in cooking skills, product packaging, and culinary business management (Wuisang, 2016). This allows local communities to increase their capacity in producing and marketing Bitung’s culinary specialties to tourists.

The development of gastronomy as a driver of local tourism also has the potential to preserve the cultural heritage and local identity of Bitung City. Gastronomy encompasses not only the food itself but also the history, traditions, and cultural values associated with it. A book written by Brata and Netra (2017) mentions that by promoting Bitung's culinary specialties to tourists, the younger generation and local communities will also appreciate and preserve their culinary heritage. This helps maintain the sustainability of culinary traditions that have existed for centuries and prevents extinction due to the influence of foreign cultures or modernization. Additionally, a journal article published by Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku mentions that gastronomy can promote Bitung City's local identity to the outside world (Soselisa et al., 2022). By introducing culinary specialties that reflect Bitung's cultural and historical mix, tourists can gain a deeper understanding of the uniqueness and richness of the local culture.

To optimize Bitung City's gastronomic potential as a driver of local tourism, collaboration and strategic partnerships between various stakeholders are required. These include the local government, tourism industry players, culinary communities, academics, and local communities. A research report by the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy states that local governments can provide supporting infrastructure, such as gastronomic tourism information centers, food processing facilities, and adequate transportation access (Kemenparekraf, 2021). Furthermore, the government can offer incentives and regulatory support for the development of local culinary businesses. Tourism industry players, such as travel agencies, hotels, and restaurants, can collaborate with local culinary communities to integrate gastronomy into their tour packages. A journal article published by Universitas Sam Ratulangi in Manado indicates that such partnerships can effectively promote and market Bitung's culinary specialties to tourists (Mantiri et al., 2021). Academics and researchers can also contribute by conducting further research on Bitung City’s gastronomic history, identifying potentials and challenges, and providing targeted policy recommendations or development strategies. A thesis written by a student of Sam Ratulangi University in Manado mentions that the involvement of academics can help strengthen the knowledge base and ensure sustainable gastronomic development...
To attract tourists and raise awareness of Bitung City's gastronomic potential, effective promotion and marketing efforts are essential. This involves various strategies and approaches, both online and offline. A journal article published by Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku mentions that utilizing social media and digital platforms can be an effective promotional tool to reach a wider audience (Soselisa et al., 2022). For example, creating engaging content about Bitung's culinary specialties, such as recipe videos, informative articles, or social media campaigns involving local influencers, can attract attention. Additionally, participation in tourism events and culinary exhibitions can serve as an effective means of promotion. A book written by Brata and Netra (2017) mentions that by participating in these events, Bitung City can introduce its culinary specialties and directly attract tourists. Marketing can also be done through partnerships with travel agencies or tour operators offering gastronomic tour packages to Bitung City. A study conducted by Pongoh et al. (2017) suggests that collaborating with travel agents can expand the promotion and sale of gastronomic tour packages, reaching a broader consumer market and facilitating the booking process for tourists.

Conclusion

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that Bitung City's gastronomy has great potential to be a driver of local tourism. The following are the main conclusions from the previous discussion: The history of Bitung City gastronomy is shaped by a mixture of various cultures and ethnicities, including Minahasa, Bugis, Makassar, Javanese, and Chinese. The maritime culture and Bitung's strategic geographical location on the north coast of North Sulawesi have influenced the types of food, ingredients, and processing techniques used. The ethnic Chinese culinary heritage, exemplified by dishes such as meatball noodles and pastries, enriches Bitung's gastronomic treasures. Additionally, religion and local beliefs play a significant role in shaping culinary traditions associated with specific celebrations and rituals. The potential of gastronomy as a driver of local tourism in Bitung City is significant. The uniqueness and culinary richness, resulting from the blend of cultures, serve as a major attraction for tourists. Gastronomy can be integrated with broader tourism experiences, such as visiting traditional food production sites or participating in culinary festivals.

Developing gastronomy as a tourism driver creates economic opportunities and empowerment for local communities through culinary businesses and skills training. Promoting culinary specialties to tourists and the younger generation supports the preservation of Bitung City's cultural heritage and local identity. To optimize this potential, collaboration and strategic partnerships between the government, industry players, academics, and local communities are essential. Effective promotion and marketing through social media, tourism events, and partnerships with tour agents can significantly enhance tourist attraction to the region. Overall, Bitung City's gastronomy has great potential to be a unique and exciting driver of local tourism, as well as contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and empowerment of local communities. However, coordinated and sustained efforts from various stakeholders are required to optimally realize this potential.

References


Sam Ratulangi.