

Government websites for promoting East Asian culinary tourism: A cross-national analysis

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ABSTRACT

The content of government tourism websites is very important for promoting a tourist destination's exciting cuisine and food culture. These websites help to shape a country's, region's or locality's culinary-cultural image; they create a virtual experience for culinary tourists. This study explores the contents of the cuisine and gastronomy websites of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, analyzing the techniques used to introduce and promote these East Asian tourist destinations' cuisine and food culture. Specifically, the researchers examined the capacity of government websites to introduce and advertise traditional and local foods, restaurants, gastronomic tours, recipes and culinary cultures (including table manners and other dining customs). They also looked more generally at culinary tourism marketing strategies, including the use of restaurant guides and certifications.

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1. Introduction

Inasmuch as a local culture's own unique cuisine embodies and expresses its "character" and may eventually become famous as an international brand, food and cuisine play an ever more important role in the differentiation and promotion of specific tourist destinations.¹ In other words, as more and more people travel in search of new gastronomic experiences, culinary tourism is an increasingly important part of "destination marketing" (Boniface, 2003; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007). The ever-expanding culinary tourism industry offers both tourist destinations and tourist businesses (industries) the opportunity to create for themselves a unique competitive advantage (ICTA, 2008) by creating

a positive connection between food and particular local and national traits (Okumus et al., 2007). Thus Cohen and Avieli (2004), pointing out that towns, cities and regions as well as entire countries may become famous for their unique cuisines, explore the role of food as an important vehicle for tourism because of its power to define tourist destinations (Long, 2004).

The role of the Internet in the promotion of all aspects of international tourism has also expanded rapidly in recent years (Wan, 2002, p.155). Many nations and districts are now designing government-sponsored tourism websites, in the hope that tourists can access information about their potential destinations by browsing them. Although the official tourism websites of some countries need to be improved in terms of information provision, updating, web interfaces, and hyperlinks (Boyne, Hall, & Williams, 2003), the government tourism website has also become a significant means of advertising the local cultures and cuisines of culinary tourist destinations (du Rand et al., 2003). Therefore, constructing effective government tourism websites is the first step in the marketing of these destinations.

With any sort of promotion and marketing on the part of the tourism industry, we have the question as to how much emphasis should be given to a destination's culinary attractions. While culinary tourism has received increasing attention, research reveals differing opinions about the role of promotion and marketing with

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¹ Gastronomy is one of the fundamentals of local culture as well as part of a region's cultural heritage (Tellström, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006). Food not only expresses or represents a country's identity; it also helps to enhance the quality and competitiveness of its tourism industry through marketing strategies and brand-building (du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003).

regard to culinary tourist destinations (Boyne et al., 2003; Frochot, 2003; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; du Rand et al., 2003). Moreover, there has been very little if any research concerned with the problem of how to make the best “use” of a given destination’s government tourism website, and particularly with regard to this destination’s culinary attractions.

Therefore this study set out to compare the government tourism websites of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand with the focus on their culinary tourism dimension. The study analyzes, using content analysis, the marketing strategies by means of which these websites use national, regional and local culinary cultures to attract tourists. Finally, the major limitations of these strategies and more generally of these websites’ culinary dimensions will be discussed, and some suggestions for future practical and theoretical research will be offered.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culinary tourism

A variety of terms have been used to express the linkage between food and tourism: cuisine tourism, culinary tourism and gastronomic tourism. According to their definitions, “cuisine” focuses on styles of food preparation and cooking alone, while “gastronomy” is concerned with the consumption of food and drink in a more general sense, and particularly with the enjoyment of good food and beverages as part of an affluent or aesthetically superior lifestyle. “Culinary” is the adjectival form of “cuisine” (meaning “kitchen” in French) but it tends to emphasize the actual practice (e.g. “culinary utensils”) and style of food preparation and consumption as well as (like the noun “cuisine”) the social context in which food is acquired, prepared and eaten. “Culinary” can thus refer to ingredients, prepared foods, beverages, food production, motivations, activities, institutional structures, and food tourism itself (Ignatov & Smith, 2006, p.237–238).

The phrase “culinary tourism” was coined in 1998 and refers to international tourists who plan their travels partly or largely on the basis of a desire to experience different and “exotic” culinary specialties and traditions (Long, 2004). That is, the primary goal of such tourists is to explore, experience, and enjoy the unique gastronomy (or cuisine) of a particular destination (Wolf, 2004). As Ignatov and Smith (2006) point out, culinary tourism may be defined as “trips during which the purchase or consumption of regional foods (including beverages), or the observation and study of food production (from agriculture to cooking schools), represent a significant motivation or activity” (p.238).

Culinary tourism is therefore one form of cultural tourism, for cuisine is an integral part of the culture of all communities, even if only some of these ever become important tourist destinations. After all, not just a community’s or culture’s food but its whole “food culture” (including cooking and dining) may become the basis of narratives, rituals, festivals or other aspects of cultural expression. Thus, culinary tourism means more than merely consuming food on a trip: it also means the direct experience of a given area’s unique culinary culture and “local knowledge” (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). The special “flavor” not just of a dish but of a locality can make it a popular culinary tourist destination, but only if its own culinary or gastronomic “image” – or more broadly its gastronomy-based cultural image – has already been emphasized, developed, promoted, marketed.

2.1.1. Categories of culinary tourists

Previous research on culinary tourism tends to find that while tourists are generally interested in the same or similar products, they

still have individual differences (e.g. Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Lang Research, 2001). Hjalager (2004) suggested the “culinary tourism experience” model, which could predict tourists’ attitudes and preferences as regards diet. In this model tourists are divided into four categories: recreational, existential, diversionary and experimental. Ignatov and Smith (2006), on the other hand, divided the Canadian culinary tourism market into three major sub-markets based on the Canadian Travel Activities and Motivations Study: food tourists, wine tourists, and food and wine tourists. The first category is the largest, including up to 25% of all tourists. Tourists who claim to be familiar with gastronomy pay more attention than do other kinds of tourists to the selection of restaurants, and are more willing to search for unique and satisfactory foods (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). In other words culinary tourists can be categorized in terms of personal expectations: different types of culinary tourists search for different culinary experiences.

2.1.2. Marketing strategies for culinary tourism

There are many tourist organizations working on the promotion of culinary tourism, including the Australian Tourist Commission, Canadian Tourism Commission, and Hong Kong Tourism Board. The marketing strategies of these local-destination marketing organizations are subject to national tourism policy (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Okumus et al., 2007; Plummer, Telfer, Hashimoto, & Summers, 2005). The mass media regarding lifestyles and tourist information, such as magazines, booklets, TV or the Internet, are powerful marketing tools for advertising food (Boyne et al., 2003; Kivela & Crotts, 2005; du Rand et al., 2003); however, Handszuh (2000) pointed out that while the practical purpose of any culinary tourism marketing strategy is to view the local food and dining culture as an important tourism resource, this culture need not normally be presented in publicity material and promotional messages prepared for mainstream tourism.

The Internet has developed rapidly in the last decade and it has become a very efficient advertising medium, one that can potentially give very strong support to the development of local brands (Boyne & Hall, 2004; du Rand et al., 2003). Indeed, the web is now the most widely used tool for searching for relevant tourist information, such as potential tourist destinations, activities, and services. The government tourism websites run by tourism bureaus, in particular, are most often used as a research tool by consumers seeking out information (including images) concerning potential destinations, activities and services for those who are planning their trips/tours (Boyne & Hall, 2004). Therefore, adequate design of government tourism websites, enabling the efficient and eye-catching presentation of crucial information, is now a key to the marketing of culinary tourism.

However, different culinary tourists search for different cuisines and culinary experiences; thus the marketers require various methods of communication, different packages and different developmental strategies for products in order to satisfy different tourists’ expectations and needs (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). Boyne et al. (2003), based on the theory of Internet marketing, divided consumers into four types according to the degree of emphasis they put on cuisine when selecting a destination:

1. Type one: Food plays an important role in the tourist experience, and tourists actively search for information about local gastronomy, featured food, and high-quality cuisine.
2. Type two: Food is also important, but tourists do not actively search for relevant information. Therefore, they only respond to messages about culinary tourism received in advance.
3. Type three: Tourists do not consider food to be a significant element of their trip, but may join in food-related activities if they experience delicious meals along the way.

4. Type four: Tourists are not interested in good cuisine, even when they are exposed to marketing information about high-quality dining.

The key point, of course, is to expose tourists of types one, two, and three to information about local food products because this may arouse their interest. Information that closely matches the needs of type three tourists needs to be provided, and this information needs to be placed in clearly marked locations other than websites because tourists of this type do not actively search for information about food on tour websites.

2.2. Internet marketing of tourism

Electronic commerce has a far-reaching impact on the tourism market (Palmer & McCole, 2000). The Internet (with the newest web technology) offers a large amount of information instantly, so it is becoming increasingly important as a destination marketing and promotion tool for the tourism industry (especially for hotels and travel agencies) (Brey, So, Kim, & Morrison, 2007; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Ho, 2002; Kim, Kim, & Han, 2007) and for large organizations (eg. DMOs, and national tourist organizations (NTOs)) (Doolin, Burgess, & Cooper, 2002; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lee, Cai, & O'Leary, 2006; Raventos, 2006). Moreover, the web has great potential for promoting regional tourism, and is relatively inexpensive compared with other promotion and advertising media (Standing & Vasudavan, 2000). An effective website can reach global audiences: it is accessible 24 h a day from anywhere in the world. The content of a website is thus very important, and must be updated regularly in the field of tourism marketing as in any other field (Lin & Huang, 2006).

Travelers search for information on tourism websites (Ho & Liu, 2005), and the content of these websites is one of the main factors contributing to repeated visits (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). Moreover, moving from simply offering information to interactive designs allows tourism organizations to identify consumers' interests and encourage their participation, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will return to the site. This also allows these organizations to understand tourists' preferences and consequently to communicate with them individually and provide them with personalised services (Doolin et al., 2002). Thus, the content of government tourism websites is particularly important to the promotion of culinary tourism: it directly influences the perceived gastronomic image of the destination and creates a virtual experience for culinary tourists. The way a website presents information, graphics, and photos in many ways influences how these messages are received by "viewers" (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). Therefore, many online visitors may be attracted through the use of government tourism websites.

3. Methodology

3.1. Content analysis instrument

Several previous studies in the tourism field have employed content analysis (Choi et al., 2007; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Hudson & Miller, 2005; Kemp & Dwyer, 2003; Wan, 2002), including a few studies on culinary tourism (Boyne & Hall, 2004; Boyne et al., 2003; Frochot, 2003; Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Okumus et al., 2007). In order to compare and contrast different countries' ways of using the Internet to promote their local food cultures and food tourist destinations, this study also uses content analysis, a technique for identifying and analyzing the content of a given text, including its words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that it seems to communicate (Neumann, 2003, p.219). The present study (1) analyzes the presentation of the food (cuisine) and food

culture (gastronomy) promoted on each government tourism website; (2) analyzes the range and diversity of gastronomic images presented on each government tourism website; (3) assesses the role of culinary tourism in promoting or marketing these countries; and (4) assesses the limitations on the promotion of culinary tourism in each country.

3.2. Sample

Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand were selected and compared for several reasons, above all the fact that these countries have several shared features. Hong Kong's reputation as a food paradise is said to be the key to the city's tourism industry (Kivela & Crofts, 2005), and thus the primary focus of its tourism promotion campaign (Okumus et al., 2007). In its tourism marketing Singapore, the "Food Capital of Asia," has adopted its rich variety of foods and food cultures as a key attraction. This city-state has also created specific policies in order to promote culinary tourism (Henderson, 2004). In the case of Taiwan, food has long been its major attraction for overseas tourists (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2007), and consequently the country has been actively engaged in developing culinary tourism in order to introduce its food to the world. Korea has successfully combined its gastronomic culture with its TV shows (especially soap operas), whose popularity helps to promote Korean cuisine and food culture (Kim, Agrusa, Lee, & Chon, 2007); in the meantime, the Korean government is also trying to better market the country's gastronomic culture and further promote its culinary tourism. Japan's "meibutsu culture" and "seasonal variations" are the two distinctive features of this nation's culinary tourism, and in its marketing the Japanese government emphasizes the cuisine and history of local communities (Tussyadiah, 2006). Thailand in recent years has been dedicated to the "Global Kitchen Project," creating overseas Thai restaurants which bring Thai food to the world and thus enhancing Thailand's gastronomic identity (Sunanta, 2005); through its promotional advertising the country also invites tourists to experience its cuisine first-hand.

However, most research on tourism organization websites has been western-based (Boyne & Hall, 2004; Boyne et al., 2003; Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Okumus et al., 2007), and there is some question about the applicability of the findings of western-based research to non-western markets. Furthermore, research on culinary tourism promotion via government tourism websites is especially limited in non-western cultures. Nevertheless, the Asian wave is on its way, and a large number of Asian countries have entered or are preparing to enter the global culinary tourism market along with other non-western cultures.

3.3. Procedure

Based on the protocols identified by Finn, Elliot-White, and Walton (2000) and Neumann (2003), a five-stage content analysis model was used. In the first stage, the aims and objectives of the research were identified and a coding scheme was developed. In the second stage, English version government websites were collected from the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), Singapore Tourism Board (STB), Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB), and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) (see Table 1), because English is generally assumed to be the de facto medium for international travel and tourism (Ho, 2002). Documents, news clips and other videos attached to government websites were also gathered. These materials were analyzed in the third stage: content analysis was used to assess the frequency and intensity of visits to the respective websites, and the percentage of content devoted to

Table 1
Comparison of six countries' government tourism websites

Dimensions	Official tourism organizations					
	HKTB	JNTO	KTO	STB	TTB	TAT
Food culture						
Introduction to food culture		✓	✓		✓	✓
Introduction to traditional food(s)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Special features of traditional food(s)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Introduction to traditional drinks	✓	✓	✓			
Guide to the cities offering traditional food(s) and drinks			✓		✓	
Origin of local cuisines		✓	✓			✓
Representative foods		✓	✓	✓		✓
Food(s) and drinks for seasonal events and festivals		✓	✓			✓
Introduction to culinary professionals			✓			
Featured foods and recipes						
Introduction to featured foods		✓	✓			✓
Introduction to special spices		✓	✓			✓
Detailed recipes for representative cuisines		✓	✓	✓		
Local cuisines						
Introduction to local cuisines	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Links to the recipes for local cuisines	✓		✓			
Table manners						
Written description of table arrangements		✓	✓			
Illustration of table arrangements		✓	✓			
Introduction to table manners	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Useful "Restaurant" expressions in local languages		✓	✓			
Information for culinary tourists						
Written description of representative cuisines	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Photos of representative cuisines	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Introduction and recipes for featured snacks and desserts	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Culinary tourism marketing strategies						
Introduction to selected restaurants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Introduction to cuisines in major cities and tourist spots	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to websites introducing local cuisines		✓		✓	✓	
Guide to vegetarian food			✓		✓	
Introduction to special foods and drinks	✓					
Recommended gastronomy tours			✓	✓	✓	
Introduction to gastronomy tour itinerary			✓	✓	✓	
Introduction to cooking schools		✓		✓	✓	✓
Introduction to festivals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recommended foods for souvenirs				✓	✓	
Celebrity recommendations			✓	✓		
Restaurant guide						
Search function – by cuisine category	✓				✓	
Search function – by area	✓				✓	
Search function – by restaurant	✓					
Search function – by specific dish	✓					
Restaurant certification						
National certification	✓			✓		✓
Guide to certified restaurants	✓			✓		
Certification promotion campaign	✓					

Note: HKTB is the Hong Kong Tourism Board, <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/index.html>.

JNTO is the Japan National Tourist Organization, <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/>.

KTO is the Korea Tourism Organization, <http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/index.kto>.

STB is the Singapore Tourism Board, <http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home.html>.

TTB is the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, <http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/lan/Cht/search/index.asp>.

TAT is the Tourism Authority of Thailand, <http://www.tourismthailand.org/>.

local cuisine and food culture in the web pages was analyzed. On average, over 500 pages of documents were analyzed for each of the six countries. In stage four, the initial results were compared and, when disagreements arose, they were analyzed until a consensus was achieved. In the final stage, the results were refined and the research findings were finalized.

3.4. Reliability and validity

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis procedure and content, four researchers who are graduate students at the doctoral level and major in tourism and hospitality

management used the Internet Explorer browser to carefully review and discuss each website's content; they then categorized all six websites according to the products, places and events they promoted and the marketing strategies they used. Besides the multiple coders, an outside researcher was invited to review all the data and categorize the websites. The results of the two reviews were found to be 95% consistent, indicating a reliability of over 0.8 (Latham & Saari, 1984). Meanwhile, three culinary tourism professionals were invited to evaluate content reliability (Sadarangani & Gaur, 2004). The researchers and all three professionals worked together to compare the results, negotiate with regard to those on which they disagreed, and make sure these dimensions were

appropriately evaluated by a Yes/No response based on the website's content. Categories were finalized when agreement was reached. According to the evaluation results, all three professionals agreed that the present study includes, or takes into account, all current Internet marketing strategies for culinary tourism, and therefore that it has considerable content reliability.

As shown in Table 1, these websites were assessed in terms of eight dimensions: cuisine and gastronomy (food culture), featured food and recipes, local cuisine, table manners, information about culinary tourism, marketing strategies for culinary tourism, restaurant guides, and restaurant certification.

4. Findings

4.1. Introduction of Asian food cultures via government websites

4.1.1. Introduction to traditional food cultures

The first step in promoting culinary tourism is to introduce a country's cuisine and food culture (gastronomy) so that prospective tourists can have a deeper understanding of this before their arrival. All the official websites reviewed provide detailed information about this, and most provide an introduction to the varieties and features of traditional cuisines, food cultures, and representative foods. Those countries influenced by both eastern and western cultures as well as by their natural environments, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, tend to focus on both local and "derived (integrated and globalized)" cuisines. For example, the Hong Kong Tourism Board introduces Tea Culture in the "Gourmet Paradise" dimension of its official website because "Yum cha ("drinking tea") is an integral part of Hong Kong's culinary culture." (HKTB, 2009). Thus, food culture is not just a tradition but also a tourist attraction.

"Hong Kong's cuisine is renowned for its exotic fusion of Eastern and Western flavours along with a wide variety of culinary delights. Its cultural blend, proximity to mainland China and reputation for quality have made Hong Kong a Gourmet Paradise." (HKTB website – Dining)

"Taiwan food: *The emphasis in Taiwanese cooking is on light, natural flavors and freshness, and there is no pursuit of complex flavors. Another feature of Taiwanese cuisine is that tonic foods are prepared by using different types of medicinal ingredients for the various seasons of the year.*" (TTB website – Cuisine)

Overall, the Korea Tourism Organization has a very comprehensive introduction to the country's traditional gastronomy on its website, which of course also promotes food tourism in Korea. The website includes "Introduction to Korea" (including Types of Korean Food, Kimchi, Royal Cuisine, Festive Foods, and a Korean Food Culture Series), "How to Eat" (including Table Manners, Types of Table Settings, and a Reference Guide to Names of Korean Food), "What to Eat" (e.g. Quintessential Korean Food, Traditional Liquors and Wines, Traditional Teas, Popular Snacks), and "Where to Eat" (e.g. Gourmet Restaurants Series, Restaurants for Vegetarians, Food Festivals, Best Culinary Day Tour in Seoul, Islamic & Indian Cuisine in Korea). This website thus details Korean gastronomical history, festival (or festive) cuisines, seasonal cuisines, local food, table manners, and chefs engaged in the practice of traditional culinary skills. The website creates a strong Korean identity and offers an in-depth guide to Korean cuisine and gastronomy.

4.1.2. Introduction to local foods and cuisines

The food and spices grown locally are the key to the successful promotion of food culture. Tellström et al. (2006) suggested that the integration of food and local features helps to develop a new

gastronomical brand and optimize the value of food culture. Korean kimchi and hot sauce, Japanese sushi and miso, and Thai spices are all important parts of a country's or region's gastronomical heritage, and therefore they are all related to its cultural identity. Thus, most countries offer both written descriptions and photos to introduce their cuisines and thereby enhance their food cultures.

"These days Korean cuisine is characterized by a wide variety of meat and fish dishes along with wild greens and vegetables. Various kinds of fermented and preserved food, such as kimchi (fermented spicy cabbage), jeotgal (seafood fermented in salt) and doenjang (fermented soy bean paste) are notable for their specific flavor and high nutritional value." (KTO website – Food: Taste the Flavor – Types of Korean Food)

In addition, Japan's, Korea's, and Singapore's websites all provide the recipes for their best-known local dishes or specialties, including the ingredients and step-by-step procedures, so that online visitors can make these dishes at home, thereby bringing these local cuisines to the world.

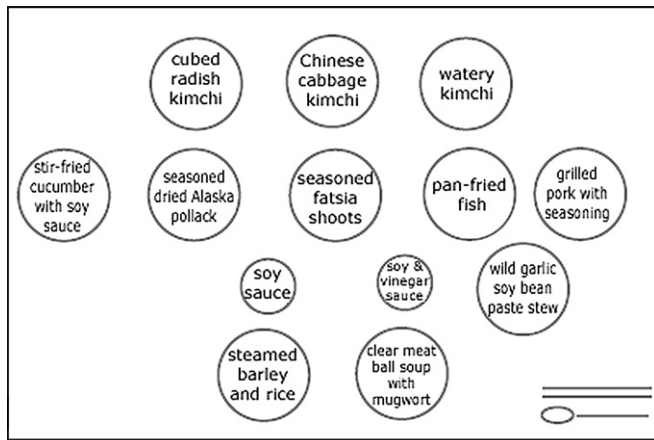
"Many visitors from other countries have fond memories of Korea when they return home, and wish to keep with them a part of Korea. Although there are many Korean restaurants in many countries, visitors may wish to try making Korean dishes at home. Cooking Korean dishes can bring back many pleasant culinary memories. This is a new and delightful way to surprise your family and friends, whether you are cooking for a formal or informal gathering. Many books on Korean cooking (in English) are available at bookstores, in Korea and your home country." (KTO website – Food: How to cook Korean food at home – Bulgogi) (Resource: http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FO/FO_EN_6_5_2_1.jsp)

"Takoyaki or octopus dumplings (Osaka): Octopus dumplings are made by preparing a batter of flour blended with stock and pouring it onto a special iron plate with holes in it, adding chunks of octopus together with chopped onions and cabbage plus some pickled ginger, and baking them into balls by rolling them as they are cooked. The baked batter is crispy and spicy on the outside and soft inside, giving the dumplings a unique, crunchy texture and taste. The basic toppings are green laver, sauce or sliced and dried bonito, while mayonnaise is also becoming popular. The octopus dumplings from Kansai are not only delicious but are also small and easy to eat, making this a popular dish throughout Japan." (JNTO website – Japanese In-Depth, History & Culture, Japanese Foods: Local cuisine of the Kansai region) (Resource: http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/food/jfood_07.html#Yudofu)

4.1.3. Introduction to table manners

Each country has its unique gastronomical tradition, which includes the selection of food, presentation of dishes, preparation skills, and the aesthetics of each dish (Long, 2004). Bessière (1998) reminds us that table manners are an important part of "dining culture," for together with cuisine (the actual food) they help tourists to experience a local culture and learn its cultural codes. Tourists will naturally learn to respect local customs while enjoying local cuisines. Yet, because tourists are often concerned about food safety (MacLaurin, 2001), the websites should provide relevant information about table manners and introduce some simple expressions in the local languages (e.g. "Is this very spicy?" or "Is this safe for me to eat?") to help ease tourists' minds.

In Table 1, we see the detailed information provided by Korea, Japan and Thailand about table manners in their cultures, in order to help tourists experience these cultures. Take the Korean website for example. It has a clear illustration of different table arrangements: general arrangement, arrangement for congee, for wine, for



The arrangement of 5-dish table

Fig. 1. Arrangement of a 5-dish table. Source: http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FO/FO_EN_6_2_2_1.jsp.

parties, and for dessert. In the general arrangement, the number of dishes can be three, five, seven, nine, and twelve (*suransang*). Fig. 1 shows this unique arrangement. As for Japan's website, there are introductions to the taboos, to the use of chopsticks and other basic table manners.

"Certain manners apply when eating traditional Japanese-style meals with chopsticks (*hashi*). The following is a brief explanation of the do's and don'ts of eating in Japan." (Resource: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/experience/cm.html>)

"Thai food is generally eaten with a fork and a spoon. Chopsticks are used rarely, primarily for the consumption of noodle soups. The fork, held in the left hand, is used to shovel food into the spoon. However, it is common practice for Thais and hill tribe peoples in the North and Northeast to eat sticky rice with their right hands by making it into balls that are dipped into side dishes and eaten. Thai-Muslims also frequently eat meals with only their right hands." (TAT website – About Thailand: Thai Foods)

4.2. Comparison of website marketing strategies

4.2.1. Dissemination of gastronomic information

National, regional, and ethnic cuisines are not just a representation of national, regional and ethnic identity, but also a way to give such an identity a deeper symbolic meaning (Riley, 2000) and to preserve national, regional and ethnic cultures (Reynolds, 1993). Here, the symbolic meaning means in effect the cultural meaning on a deeper level than that of mere indication or representation. Food is produced in a specific place, yet through local marketing it may evolve into a major attraction (du Rand et al., 2003), and especially through the use of websites the government tourism authorities can market their food and dining cultures globally.

Visual images are a very powerful marketing tool (Choi et al., 2007), one that can successfully create and communicate the image of a tourist destination (Mackay & Couldwell, 2004). Diaper and Waelend (2000) and Wang, Chou, Su, and Tsai (2007) pointed out that the effect of marketing can be enhanced by using a large number of photos and written descriptions: these make the content much more accessible to users. If a country would like to better promote its culinary tourism, photos and written descriptions really help online visitors to access the contents and topics they are most interested in. For example, the Hong Kong Tourism Board has a "Dim Sum Guide" on its website in order to introduce Hong Kong's cuisines. A great

number of photos are used to illustrate these cuisines, enhancing their attractiveness to online visitors and thus attracting more tourists to Hong Kong. The marketing claim sums it up: "No trip to Hong Kong would be complete without trying dim sum."

"[Dim Sum] No trip to Hong Kong would be complete without trying dim sum. These are delightful, mouth-watering snacks served in steaming bamboo baskets and eaten with pots and pots of Chinese tea for breakfast or lunch. Steamed pork buns, shrimp dumplings, beef balls and pan-fried squid with spicy salt are just some of the local favourites. Your Dim Sum Guide provides you with photos and a bilingual list of popular dim sum snacks, making ordering a breeze. Print your personalised dim sum guide now." (HKTB website – Dining: Dim Sum) (Source: <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/dining/dim-sum-guide.html>)

Moreover, the Singapore Tourism Board provides a brochure (culinary guide) on its website. This brochure includes featured cuisines and information on restaurants and DIY travel routes. In addition, it also contains photos of cuisines and restaurant operators in order to ease any concerns tourists might have about exotic cuisines – that they will be too strange or somehow dangerous, etc.

"Singapore Hawker Legends by Makansutra DO-IT-YOURSELF Food Trail: When it comes to appreciating food, the Singaporean palate ranks very highly. And how not, when eating is a national passion here and the offerings at the hawker food centres are vast and varied. The Singapore food culture comes from a collection of cultures, tastes and culinary exploits and there isn't a more popular way to enjoy this rich culture of flavours than at Singapore's greatest culinary institution...the hawker centres, all 113 of them.... Whether you are a Singaporean or a visitor, we invite you and your friends to come celebrate this great Singapore food culture together." (STB website – Where to Eat: F&B Experiences, Uniquely Singapore Cuisine) (Source: http://www1.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/where_to_eat/f_b_experiences/uniquely_singapore.Pars.0008.DownloadFile.tmp/Makansutra%20Hawker%20Legends.pdf)

Table 1 shows how each country's website provides comprehensive information about its cuisine and food culture. In addition to written descriptions, photos are used to graphically illustrate the representative cuisines and desserts. However, on Taiwan's website there is insufficient information about representative cuisines because most of the government website is devoted to introducing night markets and local desserts; this is done through the use of interactive maps.

4.2.2. Marketing strategies of culinary tourism

4.2.2.1. Promotion of specialty restaurants and other eating places. A destination's gastronomic culture can effectively attract tourists when it is promoted through the proper marketing strategy (du Rand et al., 2003). As Kivela and Crotts (2005) remind us, tourists' most memorable experiences in a place they have visited are often connected with its food and restaurants. Promotion of specialty restaurants and other eating places is therefore often the key to culinary tourism marketing campaigns (du Rand et al., 2003). Thus, each country or region must not only focus on its local cuisines, including drinks and desserts but it also needs to introduce and recommend selected restaurants, providing details on their locations so that tourists can design their itineraries in advance.

This is partly accomplished by government websites through their hyperlinks to local gastronomic websites. For example Singapore, as an island nation, reflects its multi-ethnicity in its cuisine, and so the websites divide its restaurants into categories like "Sky Dining," "Tropical Garden Dining," "Waterfront Dining," and "Romantic Dining." They also list ten "must eat" snacks and desserts

including herbal pork ribs, spicy crab, and Hai-nan chicken rice. There are also a number of recipes and hyperlinks in the website's "Street Food Center" and "Cooked Food Center." Korea's website has a Gourmet Restaurants Series which groups restaurants according to their locations and offers contact information, opening hours, featured dishes, and traffic information. Online visitors can search for the restaurants by district.

4.2.2.2. Introduction to special cuisines. Some tourists have special dietary habits for physical or religious reasons, so it may be inconvenient for them to enjoy the local food: for example, Muslims do not eat pork, and visitors from any country might be vegetarians. Thus, tourists should specify whether dry fish, fish sauce, or shrimp sauce can be added when ordering. They also need to be aware that in Thailand, for instance, white meat, especially seafood, is actually considered vegetarian; the Japanese believe seafood can be considered vegetarian as well. Table 1 shows that Taiwan's website offers information on vegetarian food, but it is only in Chinese. On Thailand's website, on the other hand, the information about vegetarian food is provided in Chinese as well as English and Thai: in this case Thailand's culinary tourism industry looks more international than Taiwan's. On Korea's vegetarian food website, there are introductions not only to vegetarian restaurants but also Muslim and Indian ones. As for Hong Kong's website, it introduces a variety of Muslim restaurants and cuisines; some of these restaurants provide alcohol.

"Hong Kong caters to every culinary desire, including a wide range of halal food. Muslim visitors will have no difficulty in finding halal food. However, some if not most of these outlets serve liquor. Muslim visitors are advised to enquire before patronizing." (HKTB website – Dining: Cuisines Halal Food)

"Dietary Restrictions: A great concern for travelers is food safety. If you find the food of the country you visit not to your liking or even prohibited under your beliefs or religion, it could ruin your trip. Worst-case scenario, you may end up undernourished. Especially for those that are vegetarian or Muslim, such dietary restrictions could prove to be quite challenging and even cumbersome. Thankfully, there are a number of appropriate foods and restaurants catering to both vegetarians and Muslims in Korea due to significant numbers of the population choosing alternative lifestyles. In particular, hanjeongsik (Korean full-course meal), a meal of vegetables and Buddhist temple foods, is an ideal choice that allows you to savor the unique taste of Korean food while respecting your dietary needs. Below are some restaurants for vegetarians and Muslims to ensure that their travels are both pleasant and nutritious." (KTO website – Food: Dietary Restrictions)

4.2.2.3. Local/regional gourmet/culinary package tours. Kivela and Crotts (2005) point out that the vacation packages to Tuscany (Italy) and Lyons (France) are not just becoming more and more popular, but are challenging local restaurant and other food business operators to identify the demands of tourists in order to better position and promote their gastronomic attractions. From Table 1 it is obvious that only Korea's, Singapore's, and Taiwan's websites recommend vacation packages. The Korea Tourism Organization offers the "Best Culinary Day Tour in Seoul" with photos and detailed descriptions. In the website of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, the Gourmet Guide, under Special Interests, gives a clear introduction to northern, central, and southern Taiwan's cuisines and culture, and also advertises a 1–3-day culinary tour that will enhance tourists' experience of Taiwan.

4.2.2.4. Cooking schools and culinary classes. The uniqueness of the taste of "exotic" food makes it attractive to tourists, and learning to prepare such "unusual" dishes by taking cooking classes is also a form of cultural tourism (Henderson, 2004). Through these classes tourists can learn how to prepare local cuisines, and through this they will come to more fully experience the beauty of the local culture. Looking at Table 1, we see that only Thailand's and Singapore's websites offer information about cooking classes. Furthermore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand indicates on its website that Thai food has been successfully exported overseas, to places like Los Angeles, London, Sydney, and Japan, where it is gaining popularity among those who want to prepare as well as eat it. Many tourists are attracted by the smell and taste of Thai food, so they are eager to learn to make the dishes (TAT, 2008). Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand offers information on Thai Cooking Schools – these may be independent schools or may be run by hotels or restaurants. Tourists usually can select the recipes they want to use, but some restaurants limit recipes to the dishes they offer.

The culinary classes organized by hotels are usually more expensive, but they generally include instruction in preparing complete meals. Some cooking school classes even teach tourists how to design their menus and take orders. Most cooking classes teach students to make culturally representative dishes that are also popular. In addition to entry-level classes, there are also advanced classes helping novice cooks to appreciate the beauty of Thai food. The Singapore Tourism Board promotes classes on preparing Singaporean as well as Asian, European, and Middle Eastern dishes. Their website provides hyperlinks to all of Singapore's culinary schools and cooking classes.

"Thai Cooking Schools: Finding a cooking school in Bangkok or the major provinces is increasingly easy. Most of the major hotels that have their own in-house Thai restaurant will offer cooking classes, either as intensive hands-on sessions or as watch-and-eat events. In addition there are cooking schools that provide basic skills sufficient to prepare a Thai meal in your own home, or even training to professional standards." (TAT website – Activities: Thai Cooking Schools)

"For those who love to travel and cook, pick up a culinary tip or two at some of the culinary academies in Singapore. Whether it is local, Asian, Middle Eastern or European cuisine, there something for everyone, and we are sure this will spice up your travel adventure in Singapore." (STB website – Where to eat: Culinary Classes)

4.2.2.5. Food/gastronomy festivals. Food festivals are an important promotional tool for local food culture, and thus also a vital part of culinary tourism (du Rand et al., 2003). Henderson (2004) pointed out that the advertising of festivals both directly and indirectly attracts domestic and international tourists. In addition, the implementation of food safety regulations can ease tourists' worries about food quality. Through gastronomy festivals each country can promote its local culinary traditions, lifestyles, and gastronomic heritage. Table 1 shows that each country's website offers information about local food culture festivals in order to attract both domestic and overseas tourists. For example, the Singapore Tourism Board organizes the Singapore Food Festival each year, in an attempt to show visitors this island-state's cuisine and also its dining lifestyle; the website also invites top chefs from around the world to participate in the World Gourmet Summit (WGS) (Henderson, 2004). The Singapore Tourism Board has created websites dedicated specifically to the Singapore Food Festival (<http://www.singaporefoodfestival.com/>) and World Gourmet Summit (<http://www.worldgourmetsummit.com/>)

wgs2008/) to show its continuous support of these events. Tourists and event participants can access information at any time about the events and award winners, complete with photo galleries.

As for Hong Kong, it has its “Best of the Best Culinary Awards” every year: top chefs compete for the glory of winning first prize, while tourists are given the opportunity to savor high-quality cuisine. Thus the Hong Kong Tourism Board’s website has hyperlinks to the festival websites when the events are in progress, in order to update the competition results and news, as well as the winning restaurants and cuisines. After the festival, a guide to the year’s “Best of All-Round Chinese Chef” and “Hong Kong Signature Dish” is posted online for tourists to download. In addition, the Hong Kong Tourism Board provides information on previous winners and restaurants for downloading. Thus, diners can sample virtually all the dishes that have won Gold with Distinction and Gold Awards since the HKTb launched the competition in 2001, thereby further promoting the popularity of particular chefs and their restaurants.

“World Gourmet Summit: *At this annual international gourmet event, award-winning Master Chefs and winemakers from prestigious restaurants and wineries congregate, showcasing the magnificence of culinary arts and epicurean culture.*” (STB website – Where to eat: Food Events)

“For this year’s Best of the Best Culinary Awards, the organiser, the HKTb, and principal sponsor, The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Ltd, mark the 10th Anniversary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) with a brand new format. Hong Kong’s culinary wizards will be required to demonstrate their talents in two categories: Best All-Round Chinese Chef and Hong Kong Signature Dish.” (HKTb website – Dining: Best of the Best Culinary Awards)

4.2.2.6. *Food-related souvenirs.* Souvenirs embody a tourist’s memories of the place(s) he/she has been. Tourists like to purchase souvenirs such as handmade artworks, but they also enjoy bringing home samples of their destination’s food and/or drink, in the latter case most obviously wine (Kim & Littrell, 2001). Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested that the design of a souvenir can be a vital part of culinary marketing strategy. In other words, the design of a local delicacy can improve the overall travel experience. Table 1 shows that only the Singapore Tourism Board offers information about gourmet gifts, including books on food culture and the gourmet lifestyle, and also premiums such as special food gifts. The latter, prepared using Singaporean food and sauces, enable tourists to share some of their gastronomic experiences with friends and family back home. In addition to the recipes for local dishes, the books often include useful tips and interesting anecdotes.

4.2.2.7. *Advertising local/regional cuisines.* Advertising is critical to the marketing campaigns for local cuisines (du Rand et al., 2003). Celebrities are invited to promote products because they can attract audience attention, create a sense of identification, and change audience behavior. With the right selection of celebrities, the product can seem almost irresistible (Hawkins, Best, & Coney 2001). Therefore, public figures such as government officials and entertainers with a suitable personal image can be very effective endorsers of local food products and cultures in advertisements (Hawkins et al., 2001). As shown in Table 1, the Korea Tourism Organization invited the ambassadors of Switzerland, China, Mexico, and Canada to promote Korean culinary tourism. In addition, it invited famous Korean entertainers such as Lee Young Ae, Ahn Chil Hyun, An Jae Wook, and Kwang Sang Woo to promote culinary tourism in Asia, because Korean television dramas have been a huge success in Asia. This “celebrity promotion” of Korean cuisines and travel destinations is attracting an increasing number of tourists each year (Kim et al., 2007).

“H.E. Christian Hauswirth, Ambassador of Switzerland: “The more you know, the more you will enjoy”: The more you know about Korean cuisine, the more you will enjoy it. After spending only half a year in Korea, I know very little about Korea’s delectable culinary arts. I still prefer samgyeopsal in a cozy, traditional restaurant. The barbecued pork goes perfectly with Korea’s exquisite side dishes. During summer, bibimbap is a delight, offering a variety of tastes and colors. It is filled with all sorts of vegetables and is good for you. Why do Koreans spend very little time at the table, when the rich settings with all their side dishes and specialties make for truly festive meals? You can eat for hours. I am looking forward to experiencing some regional culinary festivals and special dishes in the coming years.” (KTO website – Food: What to Eat – Favourite Food in Korea) (Source: http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FO/FO_EN_6_3_5.jsp)

4.3. Restaurant guide

4.3.1. Restaurant search

Restaurants are key to the marketing of culinary/gastronomy tourism (du Rand et al., 2003). Therefore, in order to attract online visitors, each country’s government tourism website should allow its online visitors to search for restaurants based on their preferences, and restaurants can make use of e-marketing to enhance their reputation and business (Kasavana, 2002; Litvin, Blose, & Laird, 2005). Table 1 shows that the websites of the Hong Kong Tourism Board and Taiwan Tourism Bureau have an online search function for finding local restaurants (Gourmet Search or Dining Search). Online visitors can search for restaurants by cuisine or district. The Gourmet Search function of the HKTb’s website even allows users to search for restaurants by name.

4.3.2. Restaurant certification

Restaurant certification helps to improve and guarantee culinary quality. It upgrades tourists’ travel experience by making it easier for them to enjoy quality food. As shown in Table 1, the Hong Kong Tourism Board has created a Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme and issued a QTS Sign of Quality (see Fig. 2) so that tourists can easily select retailers and restaurants recognized by the Scheme. Such a scheme helps to increase a restaurant’s service quality and to reassure tourists. The Singapore Tourism Board offers



Fig. 2. QTS sign. Source: <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/dining/tips.html>.

a list of the top 15 street food markets selected by Makansutra, a Singaporean culinary evaluation organization: this enables tourists to find the highest-quality local snacks and desserts. Even though Thailand also has a restaurant certification system, this is not part of the information on the TAT website. The Korea Tourism Organization lists the certified restaurants but only in Chinese (for Chinese tourists).

“The QTS Scheme is organised by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) to help visitors find shops and restaurants they can trust. This scheme certifies shops and restaurants that pass stringent annual assessments showing that they: Provide genuine products with clearly displayed prices; Display clearly product information and/or menus; and Ensure superb customer service with front-line staff possessing extensive product knowledge so they can answer questions efficiently.” (HKTB website – Dining: Dining Tips)

5. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the ways in which the government tourism websites of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand present their cuisines and food cultures and thereby attract tourists. It was found that while all six countries used similar culinary marketing techniques on their websites, providing information for prospective tourists on all aspects of their countries' culinary tourism experience, there were still some individual differences and particular individual strengths. For example, the Korea Tourism Organization's website offers a more complete introduction to local delicacies and food products and also to traditional Korean table manners, using detailed written descriptions and photos. In terms of marketing strategy, this website recommends the best-quality restaurants and featured cuisines of each city, and provides culinary day tours for tourists so that they may experience local culinary culture first-hand. Korea's government website also makes effective use of invited celebrities in promoting its culinary tourism.

In addition to directly promoting their respective countries' local foods, gastronomic cultures and restaurants – that is, as a more indirect promotional and marketing strategy – these government websites also offered both general and detailed information to existing and prospective gastronomic tourists (Hjalager, 2004). Of course, a successful culinary marketing campaign also needs other means of promotion, such as commercials, gastronomic tours, and the use of the mass media (Boyne et al., 2003; Hjalager, 2004; Kivela & Crotts, 2005; du Rand et al., 2003). However, compared with other means of marketing, websites can be updated faster (Boyne & Hall, 2004; Hjalager, 2004); government websites in particular are updated regularly, making their content more credible and accurate than that of private websites. It also must be borne in mind that while the target audience of these government culinary websites are obviously culinary tourists, who now comprise the largest subset of the total tourist population (Ignatov & Smith, 2006), many website visitors may be potential tourists who are less interested in (specifically) culinary tourism. Therefore, the information about destinations' cuisine and food cultures should be put in very obvious places on these websites, which after all are promoting all the features (not only culinary ones) of a given tourist destination. Each of the surveyed websites did have precisely this design, in order to meet the needs of various kinds of online visitors and thus optimize the effect of their marketing strategy.

However, there is still room for improvement in/on each country's culinary tourism website. First of all, the architecture of the website should be user-friendly so that tourists can easily search for information and maneuver between web pages. Second,

the updating of the website content is of crucial importance, because online tourists will want to obtain the latest (i.e. currently correct) travel information; after all, tourists want not only to eat well but also to eat conveniently, safely, and in some cases relatively cheaply. Most countries' websites offer information on local restaurants, and some of them (Hong Kong, Korea, and Thailand) also display their restaurants' guarantees of food quality and safety. But even if there are no such guarantees, the government tourism website must obviously contain the most timely and accurate information. The English and local language versions of websites also need to be identical and updated synchronously.

Third, the website must be attractive, eye-catching. The key to attracting online tourists and enhancing marketing effects is to offer a large quantity of photos as well as written texts (Diaper & Waelend, 2000; Wang et al., 2007). In this research project it was found that some countries' websites only contain written but no visual texts. Such websites fail to create a sense of real “presence” in or at their intended destination, and thus to motivate tourists in the way that only photographs can. However, both the written texts and the photos must be of high quality; they must be able to provide vital (discursive and visual) information and (for photos) be truly eye-catching. Photos that are not of very high quality will leave a negative impression. Also, the written texts and photos must work well together, reinforcing one another. For example, some countries' websites allow users to print out the photos of signature cuisines, but they provide no written introduction to the flavor, ingredients, and preparation process to reinforce the “impression.”

For the optimal promotion and marketing of specific culinary tourist spots, clearly the marketers need to have a very good knowledge of the local cuisine, the local foods and food culture. This is crucial to the creation of a strong “image” and “brand name.” As Godin (2003) and Tellström et al. (2006) put it, “if you don't have the right knowledge, the origin won't give the product the advantage over others' products that it could.” Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) point out that any successful business must be backed up with a good “story” (in a sense, its “brand”) to help it attract attention and thus increase its popularity, fame or reputation, and a good “story” is grounded in extensive knowledge and experience. Such knowledge is ultimately what makes it possible to establish the powerful, lasting connection – the “association” in the mind of potential consumers – between a particular country (e.g. Italy) and a particular cuisine (e.g. pasta). This again is the “story” of the product (pasta) and, in a sense, also of the tourist destination (Italy).

As Simmons (2001) says, the story behind a brand name takes effect only after that story is told, and it leaves a very strong impression. Consumers indeed tend to be connected to a brand name (perhaps for clothing fashions and bags associated with Paris or New York, for wines associated with southern France or California) through storytelling, and it is this story behind the brand that gives them a long-lasting relationship with it (Woodside et al., 2008). Thus, a truly unique culinary product must also be a representative one, for it must be given a context, situated within a specific local culinary culture. But Asian cities like Singapore and Hong Kong are multi-ethnic metropolises, and so here the cultural context is very complex, a combination of many “stories.” Due to its rich and complicated gastronomic culture, Singapore is promoted by the Singapore Tourism Board as The Food Capital of Asia. Thailand, on the other hand, exports its cuisine globally and in this way builds a new brand name for Thai food; eventually, those who taste and love Thai food overseas will want to travel to Thailand.

Gastronomy and travel destinations benefit each other, and through the combining of foods, recipes, chefs, and cultures, culinary tourism is becoming an increasingly dominant segment of the international tourist business (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). Travel

destinations that use gastronomy as their key attraction need to continue to strengthen their culinary-cultural identity (Tellström et al., 2006). Through “story marketing” these destinations’ natural environments, demographics, and traditions can be further connected to their food culture, so that each promotes the other. Tourism organizations should therefore design gastronomy tour packages that can help tourists to understand local culinary traditions; cooking classes that teach tourists how to prepare local dishes are also a good idea. The Taiwan Tourism Bureau has designed a 1–3-day gastronomy tour package in order to promote both its local cuisines and its island-wide culinary culture. And the taste of delicious food lingers in tourists’ memories, a phenomenon that can be reinforced by souvenir food gifts.

In general, “food tourism” can be stimulated by promotion and marketing on the part of both the public and private sectors (Kivela & Crofts, 2005). The creativity and adaptability of a locality’s, region’s or country’s cuisine and food culture can be a powerful element of its tourism strategy (Teo & Chang, 2000), and the marketing strategies which government tourism authorities design and put into practice on their government websites need to combine local culinary cultures with key aspects of the wider (non-culinary) culture and society, as well as the natural environment. A holistic, humane, interactive design will reinforce a country’s image. After analyzing and integrating six Asian countries’ government websites, this study has found the website dimensions most essential for the promotion of culinary tourism to be “Cuisine

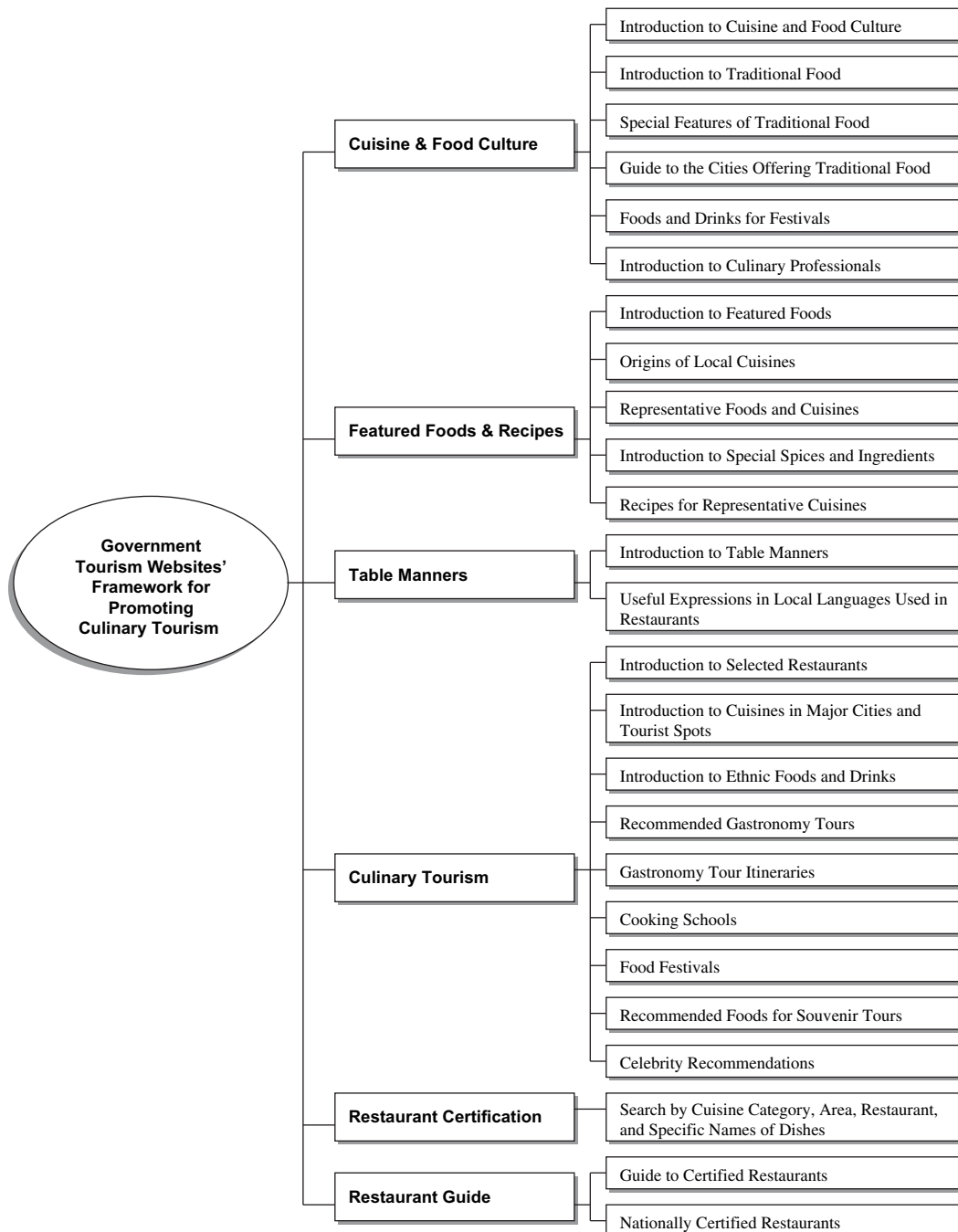


Fig. 3. Government tourism websites' framework for promoting culinary tourism.

and Food Culture,” “Featured Foods & Recipes,” “Table Manners,” “Culinary Tourism,” “Restaurant Certification” and “Restaurant Guides” (see Fig. 3).

6. Limitations and future research

The scope of this research project is limited to six government tourism websites in Asia. Therefore, future research could profitably look at the websites of other Asian countries, comparing them to these six, and/or at the websites of western countries in order to compare Asian and western culinary tourism marketing techniques. In addition, these six websites were analyzed in their English versions only. The presentations, interfaces, and marketing strategies used in other language versions should ideally also be explored, and compared with those of the English websites. The variables of user-friendliness, webpage layout, and embedded hyperlinks might also be much more fully explored in future studies. Finally, content analysis of websites was the method used here, and it has been the most widely-adopted method for website analysis. However, for scales of measurement, the six dimensions focused on in this study were evaluated only on a Yes/No scale, yet a scale of 0–4 (or still more comprehensive scale) might be used to analyze these dimensions (and/or other dimensions) in future studies. Also, other methods besides the ones used here could be used to analyze the marketing capacity of Internet websites, and to extend, confirm and/or modify the findings of this study. These might include the use of focus groups, consumer surveys, Delphi methodology, and interviews with prospective tourists who have visited specific tourism websites.

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