

## **Stories in Every Bite: Can traditional dishes drive halal edugastronomy tourism in Kelantan?**

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### **Abstract**

Kelantan is renowned for its rich traditional cuisines that reflect its history and adherence to halal principles. The rise of halal tourism and sustainable tourism has boosted interest in Kelantan's culinary traditions. Halal EduGastronomy Tourism (HEGTo) integrates gastronomy education with cultural and religious values to offer travellers an immersive experience. This study aims to explore the role of Kelantan's traditional cuisine in promoting HEGTo by examining local food providers' perspectives and addressing the preservation of culinary heritage within a modern tourism context. This study is based on qualitative field data collected in Kelantan with food entrepreneurs as the informants.

**Keywords:** Halal tourism; gastronomy; Kelantan; culture

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Food is a crucial part of gastronomy tourism. It is the main attraction for tourists who are curious about a gastronomic heritage. Gastronomy tourism is a trip to any destination where the local foods are the main motivating reasons, including tasting the food in local restaurants (Som et al., 2019). Halal gastronomy tourism applies the same concept but focuses on the halal ingredients used in the preparation of food (Said et al., 2023). Furthermore, the element of halal also includes the tayyib concept which covers food safety. Local food can help develop sustainability in tourism as well as promote social and economic improvement (Abdullah & Rahman, 2022; Said et al., 2023). Moreover, tourists usually spend more than a third of their holiday budgets on food and beverages (Som et al., 2019) which contributes to the economic growth of tourism destinations.

Education can play an important role in promoting gastronomy tourism. By providing training and resources to hospitality staff, academic institutions can help ensure that halal food is prepared and served according to Islamic dietary laws (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018). Additionally, academic institutions can guide how to market and promote halal gastronomy to Muslim tourists (Adel et al., 2021). This knowledge of halal gastronomy tourism includes providing information on the availability of halal food options at restaurants and tourist attractions and highlighting the health benefits of local cuisines (Han et al., 2021). Academic institutions can also help promote

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the development of new halal food products and services that cater to the needs of Muslim tourists. By educating hospitality staff and destination providers about the importance of offering high-quality halal food options, academic institutions can help create a positive experience for Muslim tourists.

The availability of halal food at tourist destinations is important for Muslim travellers. Mannaa (2020) found that the availability of halal food affects travellers' intentions to revisit the destination, length of stay, and type of accommodation chosen. The study also revealed that the availability of halal food does not significantly impact Muslim travellers' destination selection decisions or overall satisfaction. However, it is still important for hospitality industry managers and providers to understand the importance of halal food for Muslim travellers. As the Muslim-friendly tourism sector expands, one of the most important factors for its growth is the availability of halal food (Saffinee et al., 2021). Muslim-friendly tourism has become increasingly popular among Muslims who want to travel without compromising their religious beliefs. Halal food can also be used as a gastronomy tourism strategy. Ma'rifah et al. (2019) found that developing halal products provides a competitive advantage in the tourism business. Gastronomy offers social and economic benefits even for non-Muslim-majority countries, such as Greece and Thailand. In addition, gastronomy can introduce a country's identity to the world through culinary ties to culture, tourist attractions, and the reason for one's journey. Thus, studying the importance of halal food in tourist destinations is essential because it helps hospitality industry managers and providers understand how they can better serve Muslim travellers. It also helps Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) promote products to Muslim travellers while spreading awareness of halal principles to non-Muslim travellers.

Halal EduGastronomy Tourism (HEGTo) is a link between halal, education, gastronomy, and tourism. Gastronomic tourism is becoming an essential consideration among tourists when choosing a destination (Ullah et al., 2022). Food is an essential element that attracts tourists. Experiencing satisfaction with local foods would intensify the tourists' attraction toward a destination. Furthermore, gastronomic tourism has been shown to promote local culinary culture, stimulate tourism demand, and increase destination competitiveness. It is therefore important for hospitality education and training to include a gastronomy component which can broaden students' perspective of the industry (Suwandi et al., 2021). The study of gastronomy can help sustain local food products and enable tourists to experience excitement, education, cultural diversity, and satisfaction (Mohd Sanip & Mustapha, 2020). Combining education, gastronomy, and tourism can create new opportunities for economic growth and help preserve cultural diversity.

Traditional culinary knowledge is an important aspect of local food production. Traditional culinary food refers to the variety of locally produced food with a unique local identity within the community (Raji et al., 2017). However, the quality of traditional food products is sometimes neglected, and they may lose their appeal when they are perceived as being overpriced (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). To revitalize traditional food products while maintaining their traditional appeal, some innovations are required. In Malaysia, the national gastronomic heritage could be lost because of the lack of skilled local food providers as well as the lack of tourists' awareness of this type of food (Ghazali, 2019). Ghazali (2019) suggests maximizing the potential of national heritage food in Malaysia through activities such as identifying initiatives that ensure sustainable growth and supply of heritage food.

Maqasid Shariah, also known as Shariah objectives, refers to Islamic law's intentions and goals (Zakaria et al., 2020). It includes the meanings, general principles, and wisdom underlying the application of Shariah rulings. Maqasid al-Shariah aims to promote the well-being of Muslims in this world and the hereafter. Halal EduGastronomy Tourism or HEGTo aligns with Maqasid Shariah as it promotes the principles of preserving religion and life by serving halal traditional food with the practicality of food safety. HEGTo can also promote the preservation of intellect as tourists also protect their mental health by consuming only halal food and avoiding harmful food such as alcoholic beverages (Fisol et al., 2019).

Kelantan is a Malaysian state on Peninsular Malaysia's east coast that is well-known for its cultural history and natural environment, which contribute significantly to the state's tourism industry development (Hanan & Abd Hamid, 2017). Kelantan's local food heritage serves as the main attraction for tourists visiting the region (Abdullah & Rahman, 2022). This paper examines the intersection of halal tourism and culinary heritage in Kelantan, focusing on how traditional cuisine can be leveraged to support sustainable tourism practices. By exploring the role of signature dishes and local food culture, the study sheds light on the potential of HEGTo as an approach to preserving cultural identity while promoting responsible tourism. The study aims to provide insights into how Kelantan's culinary heritage can be used to promote halal tourism and cultural preservation.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of Kelantan's traditional cuisine in supporting HEGTo. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with food entrepreneurs selected through purposive sampling for their direct knowledge and experience with Kelantanese culinary traditions. A total of 5 participants were chosen to ensure a broad range of perspectives (see Table 1). Despite the small sample size, the purposive selection of participants ensured representation from diverse culinary contexts. The thematic analysis was rigorously conducted, with recurring themes verified through participant validation to enhance credibility (Hair et al., 2019). The interviews, lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes, focused on themes such as the cultural significance of traditional dishes, the role of signature dishes such as *Nasi Kerabu* and *Siput Sedut* (mud creeper snails) in attracting tourists and methods for preserving culinary heritage. Data were collected through in-person interviews, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, identifying recurring themes, and interpreting the findings to address the research questions. Ethical approval for the study was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 1. The characteristics of food premises

Type of Food Premise	Food Premise A (FP A)	Food Premise B (FP B)	Food Premise C (FP C)
Position	Owner	Owner	Owner
Number of informants	1	2	2
Gender	Male	Male and female	Male and female
Years of Operation	4	3	3
Signature dish	<i>Siput Sedut</i>	<i>Nasi Kerabu</i>	<i>Nasi Ayam</i>

(Source: from the authors)

### 3.0 Findings

The analysis of field data revealed several key themes that provide valuable insights into the role of Kelantan's traditional cuisine in supporting HEGTo.

#### 3.1 Understanding of Traditional Food

The informants emphasized the deep cultural and historical connections embodied in traditional food. These dishes serve as a symbol of local identity, passed down through generations to preserve heritage. For example, one informant highlighted the cultural roots of traditional food, stating:

*"Traditional food represents local culture, passed down from generation to generation." -Informant FP A*

This reflection underscores the intrinsic value of traditional cuisine as a medium for preserving cultural practices and knowledge. Another informant elaborated on the essence of regional cuisines, particularly dishes like *Nasi Kerabu*, describing how these foods are tied to the unique identity of Kelantan:

*"Dishes like Nasi Kerabu are not just food but symbolize the lives of the Malays in Kelantan. This recipe is a legacy of our ancestors." - Informant FP B*

The informants also mentioned the preparation methods as critical elements of tradition, with many recipes retaining their authenticity despite modernization. One participant explained:

*"Traditional food is the original cuisine of Malaysians, with each dish carrying a story behind it. " -Informant FP C*  
*"The original Nasi Kerabu from Kelantan should include a tumis, unlike the Nasi Kerabu without it, which is called Nasi Kerabu Golok and originates from the Siamese region" -Informant FP B*

#### 3.2 Signature Dishes for Tourism

Signature dishes are a cornerstone of Kelantan's tourism, serving as both a draw for visitors and a medium for cultural storytelling. Respondents frequently highlighted iconic dishes like *Nasi Kerabu* and *Siput Sedut* as must-try experiences for tourists. These dishes, rooted in tradition, provide a taste of Kelantan's vibrant culinary history. One informant emphasized the significance of these dishes:

*"The five main dishes here are siput sedut, grilled fish, sambal petai prawns, fried free-range chicken, and fried eggs with moringa leaves. They are also served with budu (fermented anchovy sauce) and local herbs. Tourists come to experience something different" -Informant FP A*

The informant demonstrates how local cuisine is intentionally curated to attract tourists, offering them a unique sensory experience.

Another informant elaborated on the role of *Nasi Kerabu* as a cultural ambassador:

*"Our signature dish here is Nasi Kerabu. Tourists love it because the rice represents the uniqueness of local cuisine" -Informant FP B*

Such dishes go beyond mere sustenance; they embody the identity and heritage of Kelantan. As a result, signature dishes are not just about taste, they are narratives that connect visitors to the region's traditions and people.

#### 3.3 Learning Sources for Traditional Cooking

The knowledge of traditional cooking methods is deeply rooted in familial and communal practices. Respondents frequently highlighted oral transmission as the primary means of preserving culinary traditions. One informant shared:

*"We learned from the elders; the recipes used have been passed down for generations" -Informant FP A and Informant FP B*

It reflects how the family plays a pivotal role in safeguarding traditional recipes. The reliance on oral traditions also emphasizes the hands-on nature of learning, where techniques are demonstrated rather than written. However, modernization has begun influencing

traditional practices. Some respondents noted the integration of new methods and adaptations of old recipes to suit contemporary lifestyles. As one participant explained:

*"Nowadays, some use technology like videos and social media to learn how to cook traditional foods. This is a modern way to preserve old recipes"* – Informant FP C

This blend of tradition and innovation signifies a dynamic evolution in how traditional cooking knowledge is preserved and taught. While modernization introduces efficiency and accessibility, it also raises questions about maintaining the authenticity of these cherished recipes.

### 3.4 Preparation Methods and Challenges

The preparation of traditional dishes has undergone significant changes, with traditional cooking tools and methods being gradually replaced by modern equipment. While these advancements improve efficiency, they also spark concerns about losing the authenticity and essence of traditional culinary practices. One informant highlighted this shift:

*"Our kitchens no longer use traditional tools."* -Informant FP B

Traditional cooking tools, such as stone grinders, wooden pestles, and clay stoves, are being substituted with electric appliances and gas stoves, leading to a faster cooking process. However, some respondents expressed concern that these changes could impact traditional dishes' taste and cultural significance.

As one participant explained:

*"Using technology is convenient, but the taste of food cooked traditionally is more authentic."* -Informant FP C

Additionally, the shift away from traditional methods poses challenges in passing down the knowledge of these practices to younger generations. Without active preservation, these methods risk being lost over time.

Efforts to strike a balance between tradition and modernity remain crucial. Some respondents suggested integrating traditional techniques with modern tools to retain the essence of traditional cooking while accommodating contemporary lifestyles.

### 3.5 Concept of Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomy tourism is emerging as a significant trend, attracting visitors who seek immersive culinary experiences tied to local traditions and culture. Respondents emphasized the appeal of traditional food as a gateway to understanding a region's identity. One participant explained:

*"This tourism involves outsiders coming to try our traditional food."* –Informant FP C

This perspective highlights the dual role of gastronomy tourism: promoting cultural exchange and driving economic benefits for local communities. Tourists gain insight into the region's history, heritage, and lifestyle by exploring local dishes making food a compelling cultural ambassador. Another respondent remarked on the unique nature of such tourism in Kelantan:

*"Dishes like Nasi Kerabu and budu are the main attractions. It's not just about the taste, but also the cultural experience."* –Informant FP B

The participants noted that gastronomy tourism fosters an appreciation for traditional practices, from preparation methods to storytelling around the origins of dishes. However, challenges such as ensuring authenticity and preventing over-commercialization were also considered critical.

## 4.0 Discussion

The findings highlight the important role of traditional gastronomy in shaping Kelantan's HEGTo. They provide further exploration of past studies in halal gastronomy tourism (Said et al., 2023) by incorporating the perspectives from local food providers about halal gastronomy tourism, by emphasizing the education elements such as understanding of traditional food, signature dishes for tourism, learning sources for traditional cooking, preparation methods, and the concept of gastronomy tourism. The result also shows that the word "gastronomy tourism" is not familiar among local food providers as the authors had to clarify the term before getting their perspective of it. This exploration can enhance the academic literature about halal gastronomy tourism, particularly in Malaysia. Kelantan's traditional dishes, such as *Nasi Kerabu* and *Siput Sedut* are not just culinary staples but symbols of the region's cultural heritage. These dishes provide a unique selling proposition for tourism, positioning them as cultural ambassadors (Jimenez Ruiz et al., 2024). The integration of educational elements into tourism, where visitors not only taste but also learn about the historical and cultural significance of these foods, aligns with the principles of Maqasid Shariah, particularly the preservation of life and culture. By ensuring that these culinary traditions are passed down through generations, HEGTo supports the broader objective of safeguarding cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Traditional cooking relies on a variety of learning sources, as stated by the informants. They learn the recipe from elders and the Internet, particularly online cooking videos. These sources not only preserve culinary heritage but also make use of modern advancements. Oral recipe sharing is an important approach for passing down traditional culinary techniques since it includes cooking courses in which recipes are taught through hands-on experiences and storytelling (Nor et al., 2012). The community gatherings also can be places for exchanging culinary knowledge, strengthening social relationships, and educating participants about traditional cuisine. Additionally, recipe books play an important part in preserving traditional cuisine as they can be referred to by the later generations. Hence, learning traditional foods may help preserve cultural heritage, develop social relationships, improve culinary skills, and foster a deeper appreciation for the history and values inherent in local cuisine.

One of the challenges highlighted through the findings was the balance between modernization and the preservation of authenticity. While modern cooking methods enhance efficiency, they often risk diluting the traditional essence of the cuisine (Disemadi et al., 2023). HEGTo can address this concern by incorporating educational workshops or live demonstrations of traditional cooking techniques, enabling tourists to engage directly with the authentic processes that define Kelantanese food. This approach not only fosters an appreciation for the authenticity of local food but also supports sustainability by encouraging the continued use of local ingredients and traditional preparation methods. Thus, HEGTo can play a pivotal role in maintaining the cultural integrity of Kelantanese gastronomy amidst the pressures of modernization.

Stakeholders should cooperate to develop thriving halal gastronomy tourism in Malaysia to attract more Muslim tourists from around the world. Malaysia is ranked as the top country in The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) for 2024. Local food providers and chefs can take this opportunity to promote their local products directly to tourists. As the industry's frontliners, they would understand better the market demands (Som et al., 2019). The factors that local food providers can focus on are affordable price, the food's appearance being similar to how it is depicted in promotional images, taste, service quality, dining experience, and dining image (Abdullah & Rahman, 2022). Maintaining these factors will encourage more tourists to visit and revisit the local restaurants by providing cultural experiences as well as strengthening Malaysia's ranking in GMTI. Experiencing tasting the local cuisine in new destinations can significantly change tourists' perceptions and is often more valuable and memorable than other aspects of travel. Therefore, by highlighting and developing halal gastronomy offerings, destinations can attract a diverse range of tourists seeking traditional and culturally significant dining experiences which would boost the tourism sector.

The role of community involvement in gastronomy tourism is important. The data revealed that traditional cooking knowledge is often passed down through families, with recipes and techniques being shared across generations. By empowering familial expertise, HEGTo can provide opportunities for local communities to actively participate in tourism initiatives. This involvement empowers locals by creating economic opportunities while simultaneously ensuring the preservation of their culinary heritage. The principle of promoting welfare and economic equity within Maqasid Shariah (*hifz al-Mal*) is evident here, as involving local communities in tourism not only sustains cultural practices but also provides financial benefits. Additionally, as tourism moves increasingly towards favours experiential learning, HEGTo can position gastronomy as an educational tool, offering immersive experiences such as cooking classes or storytelling sessions to deepen tourists' understanding of the cultural significance of the food.

## 5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Kelantan's rich gastronomy offers immense potential for advancing HEGTo, which aligns with sustainable tourism practices and Maqasid Shariah principles. By focusing on cultural preservation, community empowerment, and authentic culinary experiences, HEGTo can be a powerful approach to promoting local traditions and economic development. Traditional dishes like *Nasi Kerabu* not only embody Kelantanese heritage but also serve as a cultural gateway for tourists, as demonstrated by informants' descriptions of their symbolic and sensory appeal. These roles highlight their potential as strategic assets for HEGTo. This study intends to address gaps in existing research, particularly regarding the integration of halal principles in gastronomy tourism, by proposing several recommendations. First, educational programs such as cooking workshops and gastronomy tours should be developed to teach visitors about traditional Kelantanese cuisine, offering an immersive experience that highlights the local culinary heritage. Second, promoting community participation is crucial; engaging local families and businesses in tourism initiatives ensures equitable economic benefits. Third, preserving culinary heritage can be achieved by encouraging the use of traditional tools and methods, supported by incentives or collaborations with cultural organizations. Finally, leveraging technology through digital platforms can help market Kelantan's gastronomy to a broader audience, emphasizing its alignment with halal principles and sustainability. By integrating these strategies, Kelantan can position itself as a leading destination for HEGTo, fostering cultural preservation while driving economic growth. The study's limitation is that it was only conducted in Kelantan, which may limit the findings' applicability to other regions with different cultural and culinary contexts. Future research can be conducted in other regions, states, or countries to validate and expand the understanding of HEGTo.

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