Culinary Heritage as a Driver of Experiential Tourism: Examining the Behavioural Dispositions of Tourists Engaging with Wazwan in the Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Wazwan, the traditional multi-course culinary heritage of the Kashmir Valley, in shaping tourists' experiential and behavioural outcomes. Grounded in experiential consumption theory, expectation confirmation theory, and the theory of planned behaviour, this study develops a conceptual model examining the relationships between culinary heritage experience, cultural identity perception, tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intention. Survey data were collected from 348 domestic and international tourists who visited the Kashmir Valley and were analysed through partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings of the study indicate that culinary heritage experience considerably influences tourists' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.470$, $p < 0.001$), cultural identity perception, and destination attachment, all of which contribute to revisit intention. Bootstrapped mediation analysis reveals that significant specific indirect effects, including CHE → TS → RV ($\beta = 0.155$, $p < 0.001$), CHE → DA → RV ($\beta = 0.111$, $p < 0.001$), and serial mediation CHE → TS → DA → RV ($\beta = 0.061$, $p < 0.001$). Similar mediation patterns are observed for cultural identity perception. Variance Accounted For (VAF) values indicate partial mediation. The results demonstrate that culinary heritage operates via a multi-stage mechanism in which experiential evaluation (satisfaction) precedes emotional bonding (attachment), ultimately shaping behavioural loyalty. The study contributes to experiential tourism literature by providing empirical evidence from an underexplored cultural context and offers practical insights for leveraging culinary heritage in destination development.

Keywords: Culinary heritage, Cultural identity perception, Experiential tourism, Destination attachment, Wazwan.

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1. Introduction

In the Kashmir Valley, Wazwan is not simply a meal but a ritualised cultural performance, where food, hierarchy, and identity are enacted through a highly structured multi-course tradition. Unlike conventional culinary experiences, Wazwan operates as a symbolic system that communicates social values, hospitality norms, and collective memory. In recent decades, tourism has increasingly shifted from conventional sightseeing toward experience-oriented travel, with visitors seeking authentic and meaningful engagement with local cultures and traditions (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Richards, 2012). Within this context, gastronomy has emerged as a significant medium through which tourists interact with the cultural landscapes of destinations. Culinary traditions, rooted in local ingredients, production practices, social norms, and historical narratives, collectively reflect the cultural identity of a community (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016a; Ellis et al., 2018). Consequently, food has become a key experiential asset that enables destinations to differentiate themselves within an increasingly competitive tourism environment (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Okumus et al., 2018; Sims, 2009).

Building on this perspective, gastronomy tourism has gained more scholarly attention in the last 20 years. Food-related experiences significantly shape tourists' perceptions of destinations and overall travel experiences (Kim et al., 2012). The local cuisines can be used as a symbolic expression of the cultural authenticity, through which tourists can experience the daily life and culture of the host communities (Sims, 2009). Engagement in food-related activities like

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traditional cooking, shared meals and food narration has the potential of creating a lasting experience which may develop emotional relationships between tourists and the destinations (Sthapit et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2018). Such interactions are consistent with principles of experiential tourism that focus on immersive and participatory experiences that create personal meaning and long-term memory (Kim et al., 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Empirical studies also suggest that positive gastronomic experiences can have a major impact on tourist satisfaction, destination image, and behavioural intentions like revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Kovalenko et al., 2023). The experiential aspects of food such as authenticity, symbolism, and cultural interaction make food consumption an engaging tourism experience that leads to better destination loyalty (Chen & Chen, 2010; Tsai, 2016). Therefore, gastronomy tourism has become a significant area of study in cultural and experiential tourism studies. Despite the growing body of literature, the majority of the research has been focused on well-developed gastronomic destinations in Europe, East Asia, and North America, and only a relatively small number of studies have considered culturally rich under-investigated regions (Everett, 2019; Lin et al., 2021; Yong et al., 2022). Kashmir Valley offers an attractive background to study culinary heritage in tourism. The area has its own unique gastronomic character, which is developed as a result of centuries of cross-cultural interaction and historical factors. Wazwan, the traditional multi-course meal, is one of the most important aspects of Kashmiri cuisine that occupies a key place in social and cultural life of the area (Ahmad et al., 2012).

Wazwan represents hospitality, community, and social traditions of the Kashmiri community, prepared by professional cooks called Wazas, and served during wedding and other social events (Dar & Dar, 2024; Jalal et al., 2018; Khan, 2015). Nevertheless, empirical research examining how Wazwan influences tourist experiences and behavioural outcomes remains scarce, despite its cultural significance and tourism potential. This study, which explores the role of culinary heritage experiences related to the Wazwan in shaping the behavioural dispositions, addresses this gap in the context of experiential tourism. Particularly, the paper explores the connections among culinary heritage experience, cultural identity perception, tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intention based on theoretical perspectives of the works of Ajzen (1991), Oliver (1980), Pine & Gilmore (1999). The results based on survey data obtained from tourists visiting the Kashmir Valley and the application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling provide empirical evidence on the role of culinary heritage in the formation of meaningful tourism experiences and destination loyalty.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culinary Heritage and Experiential Tourism

Culinary heritage plays an essential role in both cultural and experiential tourism especially in the regions that have special food cultures (Bessière, 1998; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Richards, 2012). Modern tourists increasingly seek authentic, multisensory experiences that are culturally meaningful and rooted in collective memory (Everett, 2016; Okumus et al., 2018). Wazwan, the traditional Kashmiri multi-course meal, represents a highly symbolic, ritualistic, and creative culinary tradition in terms of its creation and hospitality, which is deeply rooted in culture and creativity (Ashraf & Andrabi, 2025; Shafiee, 2017). However, globalisation and commercialisation may threaten culinary authenticity through processes of commodification and standardisation (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Sims, 2009). Such issues can interfere with the emotional connection and loyalty of the tourists. This study examines how engagement with Wazwan influences tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intentions in the Kashmir Valley.

2.1.1. Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE)

Culinary heritage, defined as the transmission of culturally embedded food practices, significantly shapes tourist experiences. Culinary heritage provides insight into community identity, historical continuity, and traditional practices (Bessière, 1998). In regions such as Kashmir, Wazwan serves not merely as a meal but as a highly organised ceremonial practice infused with symbolic meaning (Ahmad et al., 2012; Ashraf & Andrabi, 2025). As travellers seek genuine, immersive, and locally grounded experiences, culinary heritage acts as a crucial enabler of experiential value (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Previous studies highlight that traditional cuisines can significantly shape views on cultural depth and aesthetic enjoyment (Okumus et al., 2018; Sims, 2009). Culinary heritage experience (CHE) represents a multidimensional construct encompassing authenticity, ritual performance, and sensory immersion, distinct from general food consumption experiences.

2.1.2. Cultural Identity Perception (CIP)

Cultural Identity Perception has become a key construct in the cognition and emotional perceptions of tourists in host destinations, especially in gastronomic experiences. Based on the contributions of Fu & Luo (2023), Lin et al. (2021), and Stylidis et al. (2017), CIP reflects the extent to which tourists perceive alignment between their own cultural values and those of the destination. Gastronomy is a strong cultural tool in the context of food tourism, and visitors perceive, internalise, and emotionally relate to local customs through it. These types of interactions do not only help in learning the culture but also in building an affective connection with the host culture, which makes the entire tourism experience more profound.

2.1.3. Tourist Satisfaction (TS)

Visitor satisfaction is a key outcome in tourism behaviour models. Satisfaction arises when culinary experiences meet or exceed tourists' expectations with regard to presentation, flavour, cultural value and service (Kim & Eves, 2012). Due to their novelty, symbolic richness, and their social sharing aspect, culinary experiences, in particular, those, which include local and heritage-based food are proved to enhance affective appraisal (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016b). Wazwan is experienced within a rich cultural context embedded with narratives and traditions, and this adds value and emotional gratification. TS is influenced by both the material (taste, quality) and the immaterial (history, storytelling) features of meal experiences.

2.1.4. Destination Attachment (DA)

The emotional and symbolic bonds that individuals develop with a location are referred to as place attachment (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Culinary experiences would potentially reinforce such attachment by providing affective and sensory ties with the place (Nunkoo et al., 2012). By indulging in such cultural practices as Wazwan, tourists can experience cultural participation instead of being mere consumers, and they develop a sense of belonging and cultural inclusion (Sims, 2009). DA is grounded in sensory memory and cultural experience, linking emotional responses to place.

2.1.5. Revisit Intentions (RV)

Behavioural intentions, such as revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth, are highly affected by the total quality and memorable experience (Oliver, 1980). Many research findings testify to the beneficial impact of the memorable culinary experience, especially the one, which includes a heritage factor, on the loyalty intentions (Kim et al., 2009; Tsai, 2016). When the visitor feels that the food served in Wazwan is authentic, satisfying and culturally enriching, they are more likely to share their experiences with others and will also revisit the place. Culinary experiences lead to emotional fulfilment, cultural education, and experiential value, which all are contributory to RV.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

In explaining the behavioural inclinations of tourists visiting Wazwan in Kashmir, this study is based on an integrated framework comprising four key theoretical perspectives namely, the experiential consumption theory (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), symbolic interactionism (Quan & Wang, 2004), expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Collectively, these structures offer a powerful foundation for interpreting the role of culinary heritage in impacting tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intentions (Table 1).

According to *Experiential Consumption Theory (ECT),* tourists seek experiences that are engaging, multi-sensory and emotionally evoking as opposed to functional services only (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In the case of Wazwan, the presentation of multi-course meals, sensory experience, as well as shared rituals characterizes the key postulates of this theory. The aesthetic, informative, and entertaining aspects of the meal have a highly important effect on the enjoyment of tourists and improve the image of authenticity and cultural awareness (Ellis et al., 2018; Lin & Mao, 2015). Symbolic interactionism, as applied in tourism by (Quan & Wang, 2004), suggests that tourists construct meanings through symbolic activities such as food consumption. The food culture of Wazwan is steeped with social and historical meaning, which helps to create a cultural identity perception of hosts and visitors. Traditional meals offer tourists a sense of story and sense of place, further strengthening attachment and loyalty to the destination due to the ritualistic nature of the meals (Bessière, 1998; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016b; Ellis et al., 2018; Everett, 2016).

The *Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT)* suggests that tourists are satisfied when their experiences confirm or exceed their expectations (Oliver, 1980). Culinary experiences that are in line with and beyond expectations; be it quality, cultural interaction or emotional satisfaction will translate to high satisfaction levels that consequently stimulate revisit intentions. The central mediating role of satisfaction is explained by this theory (Chen et al., 2022).

Table 1. Theoretical integration

Theory	*Core Concept*	*Constructs Supported*	*Tourism Relevance*
Experiential Consumption	Multisensory, immersive experiences	CHE, TS	Explains satisfaction from immersive food-based tourism (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 1999).
Symbolic Interactionism	Meaning-making through social symbolism	CIP, DA	Describes Cultural Identity Perception formation through culinary rituals (Quan & Wang, 2004).
Expectation Confirmation	Expectations vs. performance → satisfaction	TS → RV	Satisfaction mediates intention when expectations are fulfilled (Oliver, 1980).
Theory of Planned Behaviors	Attitudes, norms, perceived control → intent	TS, DA, RV	Predicts behavioral intention from satisfaction and attachment (Ajzen, 1991)

The *Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)* provides a framework for understanding behavioural intention, and conceptualises intention as a function of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes that are formed by satisfaction and emotional attachments to a destination like destination attachment and cultural identity play a crucial role in influencing a tourist desire to go back to the same destination in tourism. TPB assists in demonstrating the future behaviour-informing effects of cognitive (expectation-based) and affective (identity-based) evaluations.

2.3. Proposed Model for This Study

The paper employs concepts of behavioural and experience theories, specifically Experiential Consumption Theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), as well as Wazwan as a traditional Kashmiri food experience, in applying the concept of place attachment in research on heritage tourism to understand how tourists experience the Wazwan. Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE) is regarded as the most vital element in the model compared to other related elements such as cultural identity perception (CIP), tourist satisfaction (TS) and destination attachment (DA). The constructs shape some future revisit intentions (RVs) including the intention to revisit the destination or to recommend it to other potential visitors. The given model implies that the satisfaction intensity with a destination, which is deeply rooted in the participants, and the emotional bonds that they will create due to their experiences with an expressive cuisine will also affect more than just the satisfaction and emotions, but also the deeper perceptions of who they are and their associations to the destination. This builds on the assumption that gastronomic experience is significant, emotionally disruptive and behaviourally stimulating (Kim et al., 2009; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Tsai, 2016). Based on these relationships, the proposed conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

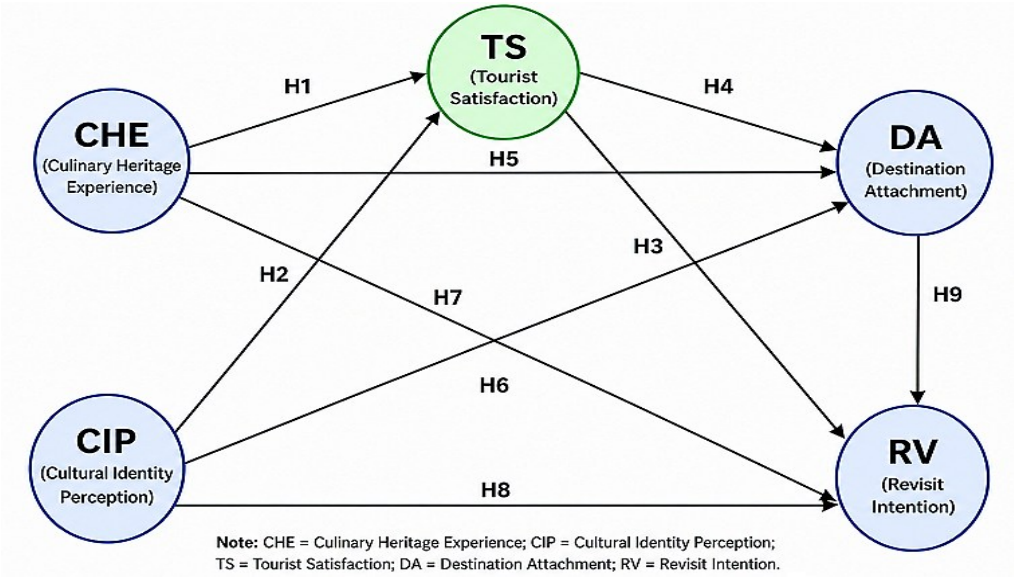

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study (Created by the authors)

Together, these studies suggest that culinary heritage can function not only as a tourism attraction but also as a mechanism through which tourists develop emotional and symbolic connections with destinations.

2.4. Research Gap and Study Contributions.

Although the focus on gastronomy in tourism has increased significantly, there are still a number of gaps in the literature. To begin with, the bulk of empirical research on culinary tourism is conducted in well-established gastronomic destinations in the Europe, East Asia, and North America where food tourism is very advanced (Ellis et al., 2018; Okumus et al., 2018; Yong et al., 2022). Conversely, culturally diverse, but little studied areas like the Kashmir Valley have not been given enough scholarly attention and yet, they also have a unique culinary tradition that makes a significant component of their intangible cultural heritage(Chibaya & Zhou, 2026).

Second, the existing studies have focused mostly on the marketing, branding, and motivational phenomena of gastronomy tourism, especially why tourists eat local food and how gastronomy can lead to the promotion and economic growth of the destination (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016a; Kim et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the literature concerning the subject has addressed the psychological process by which culinary heritage experiences affect the emotional reaction and behavioural plans of tourists, particularly the roles of cultural identity perception, tourist satisfaction, and destination attachment as mediators.

Third, in spite of the fact that experiential tourism is an essential paradigm in the study of tourism, there is a lack of empirical research that can be used to examine how ritualised and culturally engraved food traditions form meaningful tourism experiences, as well as symbolic relationships between tourists and destinations (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Richards, 2015; Stone et al., 2018).

The current research will fill in these gaps by exploring the impact of culinary heritage experience related to Wazwan on the behavioural orientations of tourists in the context of experiential tourism. Through the analysis of the connection between culinary heritage experience, cultural identity perception, tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intention, the research adds to the gastronomy tourism knowledge base by expanding the literature to a less explored destination, discovering the primary psychological processes underlying tourist behaviour development, and providing practical implications of the utilisation of culinary heritage as a source of sustainable tourism development.

2.5. Hypotheses Development

2.5.1. Culinary Heritage Experience → Tourist Satisfaction (CHE → TS)

Culinary heritage experience is intended to deliver to the participants the multisensory and cultural story on a higher level than just taste, representing the emotional satisfaction (Kim et al., 2009). The traditional Wazwan food (served in a ceremonial way) in Kashmir is highly related to the tourists and consequently, increases the satisfaction rate of the tourists. According to the past research, authentic gastronomic experiences are the most effective at enhancing positive emotional judgments of travelling (Baba et al., 2024; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mak et al., 2012). Being involved in such food activities creates unforgettable moments and psychological well-being, which is directly correlated to tourist satisfaction.

H1: Culinary heritage experience has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

2.5.2. Cultural Identity Perception → Tourist Satisfaction (CIP → TS)

Cultural identity influences the judgments of the travel experiences by the tourists. The connection between tourists and the cultural stories or values that are associated with the local food enhances emotional and cognitive satisfaction (Lu et al., 2015). The closer the cultural values of both the host culture and the home culture are, the better the sense of belonging and satisfaction (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). This association is particularly critical in cultural heritage sites such as Kashmir where food is used as an identification marker between locals and visitors (Su & Swanson, 2017).

H2: Cultural identity perception has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

2.5.3. Tourist Satisfaction → Revisit Intentions (TS → RV)

Visit satisfaction is known to be an antecedent of loyalty and behavioral intention, according to a study conducted on tourism. When tourists are pleased, they give better recommendations, and they will be willing to come back to the place when their expectations are satisfied or exceeded (Chen & Chen, 2010). Positive emotional responses due to satisfied experiences influence word-of-mouth return decisions as well as post-visit attitudes (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Emotional satisfaction derived from local culinary tourism like Wazwan is a significant determinant in establishing the probabilities of revisiting in gourmet tourism scenarios (Baba et al., 2024).

H3: Tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on revisit intentions.

2.5.4. Tourist Satisfaction → Destination Attachment (TS → DA)

The emotional attachment that travelers have to a place is defined as destination attachment. This relationship is more often created through meaningful and worthwhile traveling experiences (Ramkissoon et al., 2013). When tourists are satisfied with their experiences, particularly the food that brings nostalgia and cultural experience, they get attached to a place more. Being a fulfilment of the emotional and symbolic needs, satisfaction serves as a gate to emotional attachment (Tsai, 2016).

H4: Tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on destination attachment.

2.5.5. Culinary Heritage Experience → Destination Attachment (CHE → DA)

Literature suggests that culinary experiences that are based on heritage also trigger a strong sense of emotion and place (Björk & Räisänen, 2016b). The rituals, the community values, and the stories of the traditional feasts like the Wazwan serve as a medium of emotional connection and identity with the region (Everett, 2016). As tourists undertake these experiences, they develop deep personal and symbolic relationships with the place they are visiting, and this connection increases destination attachment.

H5: Culinary heritage experience has a positive impact on destination attachment.

2.5.6. Cultural Identity Perception → Destination Attachment (CIP→ DA)

Cultural identity influences the level of emotional attachments that tourists have developed towards a destination. The tourists are likely to establish emotional attachments in case they identify cultural parallels or value the local cultures and activities (Kyle et al., 2003). Food is a cultural artefact, which allows experiential assimilation into local cultures. Studies have established the fact that cultural connectivity enhances place attachment and helps to establish long lasting emotional attachment (Yuksel et al., 2010).

H6: There is a positive relationship between cultural identity perception and destination attachment.

2.5.7. Culinary Heritage Experience → Revisit Intentions (CHE → RV)

Memories and emotional gratification generated by culinary heritage experiences are usually strong and affect future behaviour intentions (Kim et al., 2009). Its uniqueness and cultural value that Wazwan holds in Kashmir leaves a vivid impression on the visitors, which makes them come back and experience it one more time. Past reports reveal that experience quality of food tourism is directly related to loyalty and revisit intentions (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

H7: Culinary heritage experience has a positive effect on revisit intentions.

2.5.8. Cultural Identity Perception → Revisit Intentions (CIP → RV)

The perceived cultural identity brings about a feeling of psychological proximity with the destination hence affecting the willingness to visit again. This symbolic echo builds a bond with a deeper enjoyment than the one on the surface (Jafari & Scott, 2014). The identification of cultural connections to a destination by travellers brings about the feeling of belonging hence the possibility of loyalty and repeat visits (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

H8: The perceptions of cultural identity are positively correlated to revisit intentions.

2.5.9. Destination Attachment → Revisit Intentions (DA → RV)

The existence of good emotional ties to a destination is crucial and has an impact in affecting returning intentions in tourists. Destination attachment is a psychological construct, which encourages future travelling behaviours (Tsai, 2016). Tourists who become attached are more willing to make a repeat visit and also refer their friends to the destination. In the context of culinary tourism, the links that are formed due to symbolic and emotional experiences play a significant role in ensuring behavioural loyalty (Prayag et al., 2017).

H9: Destination attachment is a positive factor that affects revisit intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey to assess the impact of the tourists' experience of culinary heritage in the form of Wazwan in Kashmir on their perception of cultural identity, satisfaction, attachment to the destination, and intentions to revisit. Cross-sectional data provide a snapshot of relationships among the hypothesised constructs at a single point in time. Previous tourism studies have widely employed this approach (Kim & Eves, 2012; Prayag & Hosany, 2014) . Moreover, the PLS-SEM approach was selected for SEM due to its appropriateness for intricate models that incorporate latent constructs and mediation (Hair et al., 2019).

The theoretical model is built on the behavioural framework's theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991),

symbolic interactionism (Quan & Wang, 2004), and expectation confirmation (Oliver, 1980). Furthermore, the study aims to explain and test ideas about how factors like Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE), Cultural Identity Perception (CIP), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS) affect Destination Attachment (DA) and Revisit Intention (RV) in Jammu and Kashmir.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from tourists visiting the Kashmir Valley, a culturally rich region known for its traditional multi-course cuisine, Wazwan. Using a purposive non-probability sampling technique, participants were approached at heritage food venues, houseboats, and tourism hotspots such as Srinagar, Gulmarg, and Pahalgam between February and July 2025.

Participants were screened to ensure that they had either experienced or observed the preparation and consumption of Wazwan during their visit. A total of 348 valid responses were obtained, consistent with the suggested sample sizes for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2021). The sample consisted of 70.11% domestic tourists and 29.89% overseas tourists, facilitating cross-cultural insights on culinary heritage. Participants completed the survey using self-administered questionnaires, either in person or through QR code digital links. Before full deployment, the survey instrument underwent pilot testing with 30 respondents to verify clarity and face validity.

3.3. Measurement Instrument

This study employed a structured questionnaire that contains closed-ended items measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Agree). As suggested by (Preston & Colman, 2000), seven-point scales are more effective than shorter options because they capture outstanding psychometric sensitivity and discriminative power.

The research questionnaire comprises 27 items distributed across five dimensions, with the measurement items adapted from prior empirical studies to ensure content validity and reliability. The following section presents the constructs and their respective sources.

Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE): This construct captures the experiential dimensions of engaging with culinary traditions, especially Wazwan in the Kashmiri context. It comprises five dimensions, which are immersion, participation, fun, education, and surprise. These were adapted from (Cole & Scott, 2004; Kao et al., 2008). They observed that these experiential elements facilitate tourists' cultural learning and emotional involvement.

Cultural Identity Perception (CIP): This construct analyses the perception, identification, and internalization of cultural elements by the tourists through gastronomic experiences. It was adapted from (Fu & Luo, 2023; Huang et al., 2025; Niu et al., 2025; Stylos et al., 2016). The authors argue that cultural immersion and recognition aid in identity formation, along with a cognitive-affective connection to the place.

Tourist Satisfaction (TS): This variable is defined as a specific psychological result stemming from the experience of culinary tourism. The components capture satisfaction and a sense of achievement that comes from engaging with Wazwan-related activities. This construct was adapted from the research of (Fitrizal et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2012; Oh et al., 2007; Su & Hsu, 2013), which highlighted that satisfaction is a crucial determinant of loyalty in experience tourism.

Destination Attachment (DA): Destination attachment describes the emotional and symbolic connection that a tourist forms with a location. The items originated from the foundational contributions of (Cao et al., 2021; Ram et al., 2016; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Xie & Wang, 2024), were subsequently refined by (Ramkissoon et al., 2013), who characterize attachment as functional (place dependence) and affective (place identity).

Revisit Intention (RV): This construct examines the chance of tourists returning to the destination or suggesting it to others. It measures both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral intentions, as defined by previous studies on tourism loyalty conducted by (Mechinda et al., 2009; Nguyen Viet et al., 2020; Stylos et al., 2016; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

3.4. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed via partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0, appropriate for models comprising numerous constructs, reflective indicators, and limited sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis employed a twofold methodology:

3.4.1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated for indicator reliability (item loadings > 0.70), internal consistency reliability (composite reliability > 0.80), and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50). We utilized the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis to determine discriminant validity. All values satisfied the thresholds, signifying robust measurement quality. Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were evaluated to detect multicollinearity; all variables demonstrated VIF < 3.0, confirming stable regression results.

3.4.2. Evaluation of the Structural Model

Path coefficients were assessed by bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, producing t-statistics and p-values for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019). The model's predictive usefulness was evaluated by Stone-Geisser's Q2 statistic, while the R2 values represented the extent of variance elucidated in the endogenous constructs (Marcoulides, 1998). The model fit was additionally assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which fell below the advised threshold of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), signifying an adequate global model fit.

4. Results

4.1. Respondent Characteristics

The sample is primarily male (65.23%), and females account for 34.77%. The sample is predominantly young (40.8% under 30 years and 28.2% in the 31–40 age range), suggesting that the tourist segment is young (Table 2). Most are well-educated, with 50% graduates and 33.33% master's degrees. This indicates a well-educated respondent base in terms of education. Most of the members are employed (57.76%), followed by self-employed (27.59%), reflecting a highly economically active group.

Table 2. Sample profile

Demographic	*(n) Frequency*	*Percentage*
Gender		
Male	227	65.23
Female	121	34.77
Age of Respondents		
Below 30	142	40.8
31–40	98	28.2
41–60	76	21.8
Above 60	32	9.2
Education Level		
Primary/ Secondary	6	1.72
10th-12th	74	21.26
Graduates	158	45.40
Masters	105	30.17
Doctoral	05	1.44
Occupation		
Employed	201	57.76
Self-employed	96	27.59
Unemployed	15	4.31
Retired	36	10.34
Tourist Category		
International	104	29.89
Domestic	244	70.11
Annual Income (INR)		
Under 2 Lakh	42	12.06
200001 to 400000	79	22.70
400001 to 600000	104	29.88
600001 to 800000	63	18.10
800001 to 10,00,000	38	10.91
Above 10,00,000	22	6.32
Previous Visits to Kashmir		
First Time	177	50.86
1–2 Times	122	35.06
3–5 Times	32	9.19
More than 5 Times	17	4.88
Primary Reason for Visit		
Leisure	141	40.51
Cultural Tourism	58	16.66
Gastronomy	46	13.21
Business	79	22.70
Other	24	6.88

The majority of the respondents are domestic tourists (70.11%) with a middle-income profile primarily in the ₹400,001–₹600,000 range. Over half of the respondents are first-time visitors, followed by repeat visitors across multiple visit categories. The primary reason for travel is Leisure, followed by business, while cultural and gastronomic tourism are important but minor reasons.

4.2. Measurement Model

4.2.1. Measurement Model (Outer Model)

This study validated the measurement model employing validity and reliability testing. The analysis utilized the measurement model in SmartPLS, using the PLS Algorithm. Figure 2 illustrates the bootstrapping output of the PLS Algorithm.

4.2.2. Measurement Model Results

The measuring model was analyzed to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs for increasing accuracy and internal consistency. The assessment was performed through the PLS Algorithm in SmartPLS. The evaluation of convergent validity commenced with the assessment of outer loading values, which needed to be greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2021), along with the requirement of the average variance extracted (AVE) to be more than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019).

The assessment of discriminant validity was conducted with the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis. Finally, reliability was assessed to evaluate the consistency of the constructs using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Table 3 presents the outcomes of the convergent validity and reliability assessments.

The measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity for all constructs. All indicator loadings are above the suggested criterion of 0.70, which means that every item substantially influences the latent construct. The average variance extracted (AVE) values of all constructs ranged from 0.597 for Revisit Intentions (RV) to 0.726 for Destination Attachment (DA), all surpassing the 0.50 mark, which confirms adequate convergent validity.

The composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs were between 0.854 and 0.931, while the Cronbach's alpha (CA) values were between 0.782 and 0.906. Both these figures surpass the benchmark of 0.70. Taken together, these findings confirm that the measurement model has strong internal consistency and construct validity, thus justifying its suitability for subsequent structural model analysis.

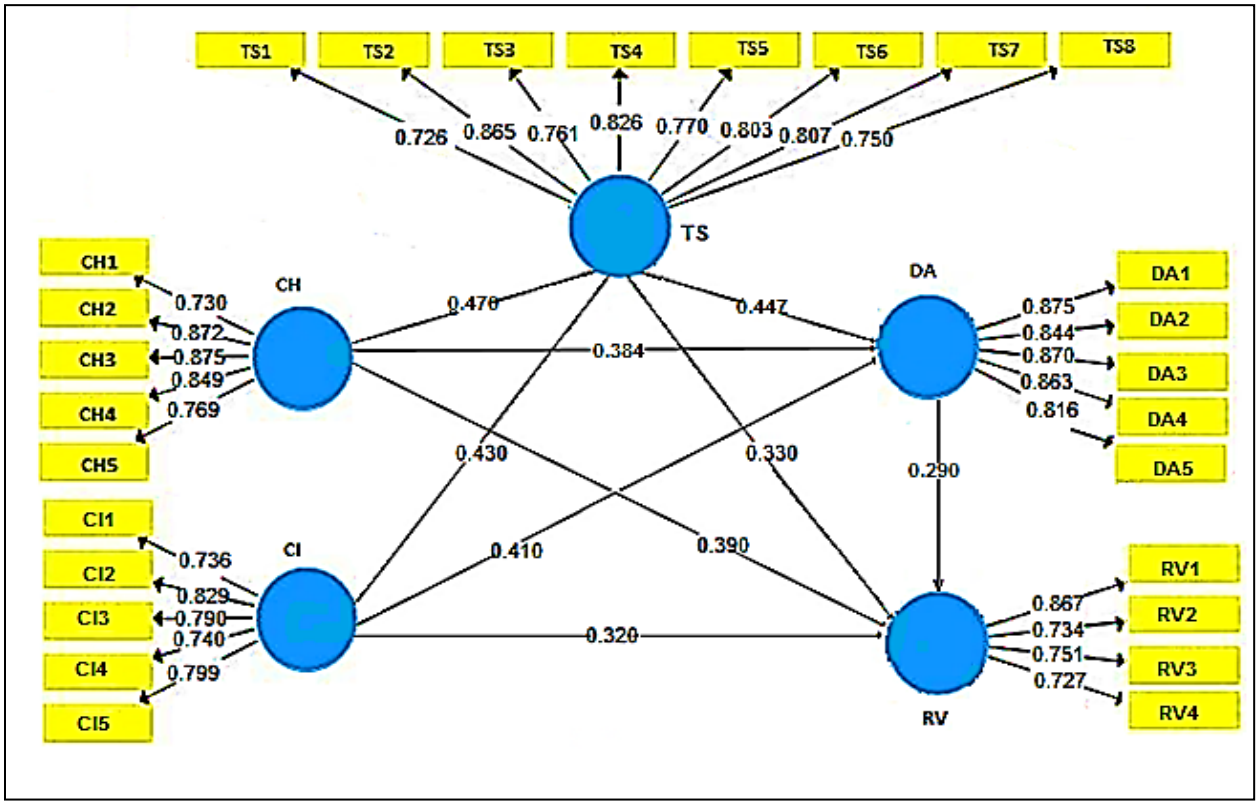

Figure 2. Measurement model PLS algorithm (Created by the authors)

Table 3. Convergent validity & reliability

Construct	*Item*	*Loading*	*AVE*	*CR*	*CA*
Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE)	CHE01	0.730	0.673	0.900	0.861
	CHE02	0.872			
	CHE03	0.875			
	CHE04	0.849			
	CHE05	0.769			
Cultural Identity Perception (CIP)	CIP01	0.736	0.610	0.881	0.831
	CIP02	0.829			
	CIP03	0.790			
	CIP04	0.740			
	CIP05	0.799			
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	TS01	0.726	0.621	0.927	0.906
	TS02	0.865			
	TS03	0.761			
	TS04	0.826			
	TS05	0.770			
	TS06	0.803			
	TS07	0.807			
	TS08	0.750			
Destination Attachment (DA)	DA01	0.875	0.726	0.931	0.898
	DA02	0.844			
	DA03	0.870			
	DA04	0.863			
	DA05	0.816			
Revisit Intentions (RV)	RV01	0.867	0.597	0.854	0.782
	RV02	0.734			
	RV03	0.751			
	RV04	0.727			

Source: Primary data (2025). AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability; CA: Cronbach's Alpha

4.2.3. Discriminant Validity Assessment Using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Step 1: AVE and √AVE Values

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used in a two-step process to evaluate discriminant validity. The first stage is to calculate the average variance extracted (AVE) as well as the square root of AVE (√AVE) for each construct. According to the data in Table 3, all the AVE values were above the suggested minimum of 0.50, which confirms convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). The √AVE values for each construct were as follows: Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE) = 0.820, Cultural Identity Perception (CIP) = 0.781, Tourist Satisfaction (TS) = 0.788, Destination Attachment (DA) = 0.852, and Revisit Intentions (RV) = 0.773 (Table 4). The values reflect the extent to which each construct correlates more strongly with its indicators compared to other constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant validity

Construct	*AVE*	*√AVE*
Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE)	0.673	0.820
Cultural Identity Perception (CIP)	0.610	0.781
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	0.621	0.788
Destination Attachment (DA)	0.726	0.852
Revisit Intention (RV)	0.597	0.773

Step 2: Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Matrix

In Step 2, focus shifts to the Fornell-Larcker Matrix of Discriminant Validity, where the diagonal cells contain the square root of AVE values (√AVE) and the off-diagonal cells contain the inter-construct correlation (Table 5). Discriminant validity is affirmed if the square root of average variance extracted (√AVE) for each construct is greater than the correlational value with all other constructs in the model. In this case, each construct's √AVE, as shown in the diagonal, is greater than the corresponding off-diagonal values, thus confirming the discriminant validity has been successfully achieved. As an illustration, the √AVE of Destination Attachment (DA) is 0.852, which is greater than the correlation with Tourist Satisfaction (0.642), Cultural Identity Perception (0.607), Culinary Heritage Experience (0.590) and Revisit Intentions (0.682). Similar patterns are observed across all other constructs.

These results confirm that the way we measured the variables meets the standards for discriminant validity set by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and backed by (Hair et al., 2021), which indicate that the hidden variables in this study are different from each other.

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	*CHE*	*CIP*	*TS*	*DA*	*RV*
CHE	0.820				
CIP	0.612	0.781			
TS	0.630	0.584	0.788		
DA	0.590	0.607	0.642	0.852	
RV	0.554	0.572	0.693	0.682	0.773

4.2.4. Discriminant Validity and Cross-Loading Test

Table 6 presents the cross-loading results to assess discriminant validity. According to Hair et al. (2019), an item should load higher on its assigned construct than on any other construct. Values in bold indicate the highest loading for each item, which confirms that each indicator demonstrates acceptable discriminant validity by loading more strongly on its associated latent variable.

4.2.5. Discriminant Validity Assessment Using Cross-Loading Analysis

An item indicates excellent discriminant validity when it has a higher loading on the related construct than on any other construct in the model (Hair et al., 2019). The data presented in Table 6 demonstrate that each measurement item has the highest loadings on its corresponding latent construct, consistently exceeding the loadings on other constructs. For instance, item CHE03 exhibits a loading of 0.875 on Culinary Heritage Experience (CHE), which is significantly greater than its loadings on Cultural Identity Perception (0.601), Tourist Satisfaction (0.671), Destination Attachment (0.558), and Revisit Intentions (0.488). In a similar manner, item DA01 demonstrates a loading of 0.875 on Destination Attachment (DA), surpassing its correlations with all other constructs.

This pattern is consistent across all items, each of which has the highest loading on the construct to which it is assigned. These results indicate that each item is more effective in measuring its latent variable than any other item, which satisfies the criteria for discriminant validity in cross-loading analysis. To summarize, the findings of the cross-loading tests demonstrate the uniqueness of the constructs, which fortify the measurement model's reliability.

Table 6. Discriminant validity and cross-loading test

Item	*CHE*	*CIP*	*TS*	*DA*	*RV*
CHE01	**0.730**	0.482	0.497	0.431	0.400
CHE02	**0.872**	0.614	0.645	0.562	0.496
CHE03	**0.875**	0.601	0.671	0.558	0.488
CHE04	**0.849**	0.572	0.658	0.543	0.467
CHE05	**0.769**	0.501	0.610	0.481	0.429
CIP01	0.535	**0.736**	0.509	0.472	0.410
CIP02	0.601	**0.829**	0.598	0.502	0.460
CIP03	0.577	**0.790**	0.587	0.483	0.439
CIP04	0.542	**0.740**	0.565	0.478	0.431
CIP05	0.578	**0.799**	0.579	0.489	0.440
TS01	0.598	0.563	**0.726**	0.541	0.495
TS02	0.667	0.609	**0.865**	0.621	0.579
TS03	0.618	0.577	**0.761**	0.582	0.513
TS04	0.645	0.612	**0.826**	0.603	0.551
TS05	0.620	0.580	**0.770**	0.585	0.520
TS06	0.634	0.593	**0.803**	0.607	0.541
TS07	0.638	0.598	**0.807**	0.614	0.552
TS08	0.605	0.565	**0.750**	0.572	0.505
DA01	0.590	0.559	0.656	**0.875**	0.678
DA02	0.570	0.530	0.632	**0.844**	0.655
DA03	0.577	0.542	0.645	**0.870**	0.661
DA04	0.569	0.534	0.638	**0.863**	0.659
DA05	0.552	0.514	0.621	**0.816**	0.640
RV01	0.512	0.480	0.597	0.675	**0.867**
RV02	0.468	0.449	0.561	0.631	**0.734**
RV03	0.489	0.463	0.574	0.648	**0.751**
RV04	0.462	0.442	0.548	0.622	**0.727**

4.3. Structural Model

4.3.1. Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model was assessed through three distinct analyses: assessment of the coefficient of determination (R^2), a Q-square predictive relevance test, and path coefficient assessment. A visual representation of the bootstrapping results used for testing the structural model is presented in Figure 3.

4.3.2. R-Square, Adjusted R-Square, and Q-Square

The coefficient of determination test using the R-squared value was conducted to illustrate the extent of the relationship among variables. The R-squared tells us the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable and which of the variables has a considerable impact. At the same time, the Q-Square test was conducted to determine the predictive power of the model on the outcomes influenced by the independent variable. This test aims to assess the model's predictive accuracy and relevance. The coefficient of determination test and predictive relevance test are presented in Table 7.

Structural model evaluation is done by coefficient of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2, and predictive relevance (Q^2). Table 7 indicates the R-square (R^2), Adjusted R-square, and Q-square (Q^2) values for the three main areas: Tourist Satisfaction (TS), Destination Attachment (DA), and Revisit Intentions (RV). The R^2 values indicate the proportion of variance in each endogenous construct explained by its exogenous predictors, serving as a key measure of explanatory power in the structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

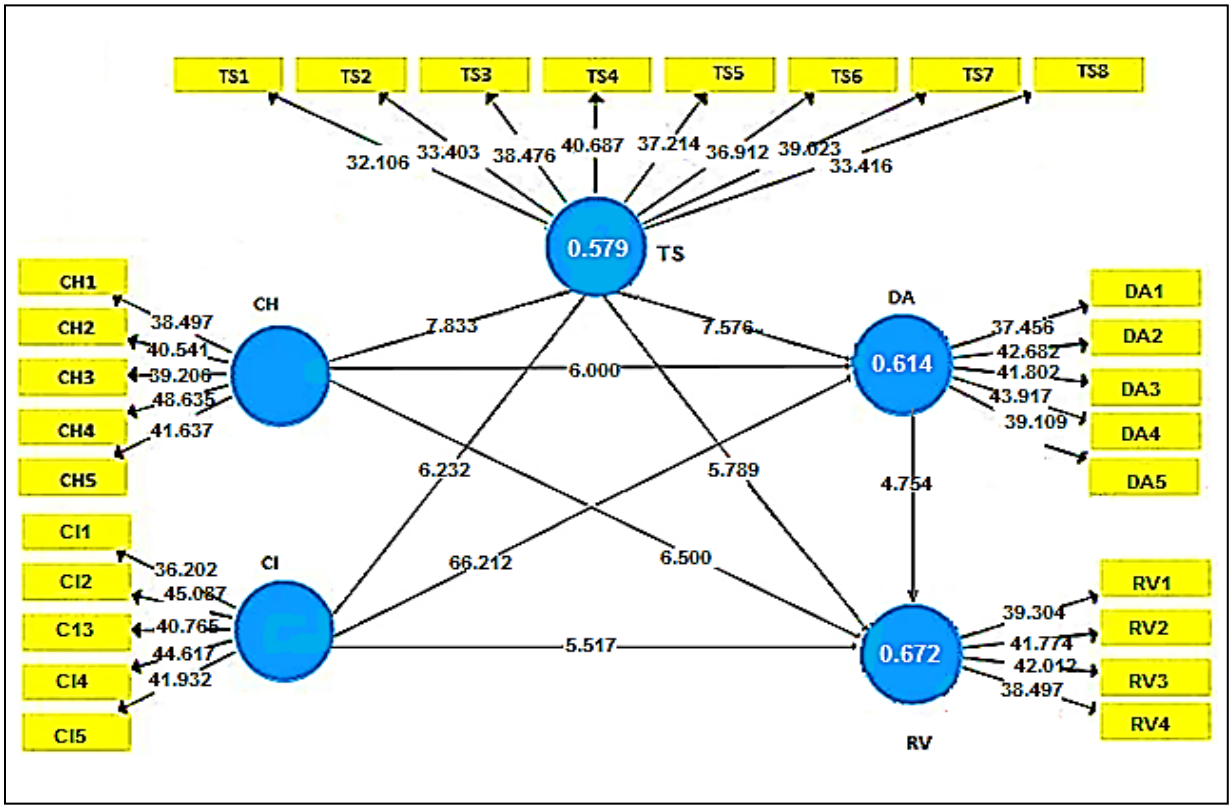

Figure 3. Structural model with path coefficients obtained from SmartPLS bootstrapping (Created by the authors based on 2025 data)

Table 7. R-Square, adjusted R-square, and Q-square results

Variables	*R-square (R^2)*	*Adjusted R-square*	*Q-square (Q^2)*
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	0.579	0.574	0.371
Destination Attachment (DA)	0.614	0.610	0.390
Revisit Intentions (RV)	0.672	0.667	0.425

The R^2 value for tourist satisfaction is 0.579, suggesting that approximately 57.9% of the variance in TS is explained by its preceding variables. Similarly, Destination Attachment exhibits a R^2 of 0.614, indicating that 61.4% of its variance is accounted for. Revisit intentions exhibit strong explanatory power, with a R^2 of 0.672, indicating that 67.2% of the variation in RV is explained by the model. The adjusted R^2 values, which account for model complexity, are marginally lower; however, they consistently demonstrate robustness throughout all sections of the model, suggesting that the model effectively accounts for the data.

Moreover, the Q^2 values derived from blindfolding procedures assess the model's predictive relevance. All Q^2 values exceed the threshold of 0.00, suggesting that the model exhibits considerable predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2019; Marcoulides, 1998). The Q^2 scores of 0.371 for TS, 0.390 for DA, and 0.425 for RV indicate varying levels of predictive relevance, ranging from moderate to strong. In addition, the findings indicate that the structural model exhibits strong explanatory and predictive capabilities, confirming its effectiveness in clarifying relationships among the constructs analysed.

4.3.3. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model results are presented in Table 8 and include path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values. Culinary heritage experience (CHE) positively influences tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.470$, $t = 7.833$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, cultural identity perception (CIP) positively influences tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.430$, $t = 6.232$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that stronger perceptions of cultural identity enhance satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction significantly influences both revisit intentions ($\beta = 0.330$, $t = 5.789$, $p < 0.001$) and destination attachment ($\beta = 0.447$, $t = 7.576$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, both culinary heritage experience ($\beta = 0.384$, $t = 6.000$, $p < 0.001$) and cultural identity perception ($\beta = 0.410$, $t = 6.212$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influence destination attachment, highlighting their role in strengthening emotional connections with the destination. The direct effects of culinary heritage experience ($\beta = 0.390$, $t = 6.500$, $p < 0.001$) and cultural identity perception ($\beta = 0.320$, $t = 5.517$, $p < 0.001$) on revisit intentions are statistically significant, indicating that both experiential and identity-related factors shape tourists' behavioural intentions. Destination attachment is also a significant predictor of revisit intentions ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 4.754$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 8. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Path	*Original Sample (β)*	*Sample Mean (M)*	*Standard Deviation (SD)*	*t-statistics*	*p-value*
CHE → TS	0.470	0.472	0.060	7.833	< 0.001
CIP → TS	0.430	0.428	0.069	6.232	< 0.001
TS → RV	0.330	0.328	0.057	5.789	< 0.001
TS → DA	0.447	0.449	0.059	7.576	< 0.001
CHE → DA	0.384	0.383	0.064	6.000	< 0.001
CIP → DA	0.410	0.411	0.066	6.212	< 0.001
CHE → RV	0.390	0.392	0.060	6.500	< 0.001
CIP → RV	0.320	0.318	0.058	5.517	< 0.001
DA → RV	0.290	0.291	0.061	4.754	< 0.001

Table 9. Indirect effects

Path	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
CHE → TS → RV	0.155	4.429	<0.001	Supported
CHE → DA → RV	0.111	3.581	<0.001	Supported
CHE → TS → DA → RV	0.061	3.389	<0.001	Supported
CIP → TS → RV	0.142	4.303	<0.001	Supported
CIP → DA → RV	0.119	3.967	<0.001	Supported
CIP → TS → DA → RV	0.056	3.294	<0.001	Supported

Based on (Cohen, 1988) guidelines adapted for PLS-SEM, most relationships fall within the moderate effect size range (β = 0.30–0.49), including CHE → TS (0.470), CIP → TS (0.430), TS → DA (0.447), and CHE → RV (0.390). The moderate effect size of CHE → TS (β = 0.470) indicates that enhancing culinary experience quality can meaningfully improve tourist satisfaction, but it is not sufficient alone to drive loyalty. Instead, it must operate alongside identity perception and emotional attachment. Similarly, the moderate effect of TS → RV (β = 0.330) suggests that satisfaction is a necessary but not dominant predictor of revisit intention, reinforcing the need for multi-dimensional experience design rather than reliance on a single factor.

4.3.4. Mediation Analysis (Bootstrapping Results)

The mediation analysis was done using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples in SmartPLS 4.0 to evaluate the indirect effects between the constructs (Table 9).

Indirect effects were assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Tourist satisfaction (TS) acts as a mediator in the relationship between culinary heritage experience (CHE) and revisit intentions (RV), with a significant indirect effect (β = 0.155, p < 0.001). Destination attachment (DA) also acts as a mediator (β = 0.111, p < 0.001), although to a lesser extent. The serial mediation path (CHE → TS → DA → RV) is also significant (β = 0.061, p < 0.001), indicating that culinary experiences influence revisit intentions through a sequential process involving satisfaction and destination attachment. Both tourist satisfaction (TS) (β = 0.142, p < 0.001) and destination attachment (DA) (β = 0.119, p < 0.001) significantly mediate the relationship between cultural identity perception (CIP) and revisit intentions, with an additional significant serial mediation effect (β = 0.056, p < 0.001).

The variance accounted for (VAF) indicates partial mediation, with 45.6% of the total effect for CHE → RV and 49.7% for CIP → RV explained through indirect paths (Table 10 and 11). These findings suggest that satisfaction and destination attachment account for a substantial proportion of the effect of culinary heritage experience and cultural identity perception on revisit intentions. The presence of significant serial mediation (CHE → TS → DA → RV) indicates a hierarchical psychological process in which experiential evaluation (satisfaction) precedes emotional bonding (attachment), ultimately shaping behavioural loyalty.

This research provides empirical insights into the role of culinary heritage as a predictor of experiential tourism outcomes. Tourist satisfaction emerges as a stronger predictor of revisit intentions, indicating that cognitive evaluation plays a primary role in shaping behavioural responses. Although destination attachment also influences revisit intentions, its relatively weaker effect suggests that emotional bonding develops as a secondary process. Cultural identity perception exhibits both direct and indirect effects on revisit intentions, with the strongest influence occurring through satisfaction and destination attachment. This suggests that identity alone may not lead to loyalty unless it contributes to satisfying and meaningful experiences. The mediation results further demonstrate that culinary heritage experience influences revisit intentions both directly and indirectly through satisfaction and destination attachment, indicating complementary (partial) mediation. This highlights the importance of designing immersive, participative, and culturally relevant culinary experiences that enhance satisfaction and foster emotional attachment.

Table 10. Total effects

Path	*Direct*	*Indirect*	*Total*
CHE → RV	0.390	0.327	0.717
CIP → RV	0.320	0.317	0.637

Table 11. VAF analysis

Path	VAF	Interpretation
CHE → RV	45.6%	Partial mediation
CIP → RV	49.7%	Partial mediation

Overall, the findings support a multi-stage behavioural mechanism in which culinary heritage experience influences revisit intentions both directly and indirectly through satisfaction and destination attachment, ultimately enhancing behavioural loyalty.

5. Discussion

This research offers empirical insights into the role of culinary heritage, specifically Wazwan, in shaping experiential outcomes in tourism. The findings highlight the relative importance of satisfaction, attachment, and cultural identity in shaping revisit intentions.

Culinary satisfaction, in particular, is the most significant predictor of revisit intentions, pointing to the role of immediate reflections. This indicates that immediate experiential evaluation plays a more critical role than long-term emotional bonding. Meeting or exceeding tourists' expectations of the culinary experience positively contributes to revisit intentions.

Destination attachment is important, but it is a lesser influence, which implies that the bond is developed over time and serves to facilitate revisit behavior.

Perception of cultural identity also supports revisit intentions directly and indirectly, but the most significant impact is through satisfaction and destination attachment. This evidence suggests that awareness or appreciation of cultural value is not enough to fuel loyalty. What's required is for a tourist to experience cultural elements (such as Wazwan) in an interactive and satisfying way. It is through this process that culture can impact positively on behaviour.

The mediation results reveal a structured psychological mechanism rather than isolated relationships. Culinary heritage experience does not directly translate into loyalty; instead, it first generates cognitive evaluation (satisfaction), which then enables emotional bonding (attachment), ultimately leading to behavioural intention. This sequential process confirms that experiential tourism operates through layered cognitive–affective pathways rather than immediate behavioural responses.

In summary, the results suggest a multi-level process where experience-culinary and sensory traits lead to satisfaction, subsequently fostering emotional attachment and ultimately revisit intentions. This implies culinary tourism should prioritize not only cultural authenticity but also focus on delivering a high-quality tourist experience to maximize satisfaction and, ultimately, destination attachment.

6. Theoretical Implications

This study offers empirical contributions to the experiential tourism, culinary tourism and destination loyalty particularly, with regard to Kashmir, which is culturally distinctive and under research. This study employs the Wazwan to support the Experiential Consumption Theory which was applied to heritage cuisine by (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) to establish that satisfaction and loyalty intentions of tourists can be through fulfilment, multi-dimensional and ritualistic food experiences. The article demonstrates the shift in the development of tourism products of merely functional qualities towards emotional and symbolic ones (Oh et al., 2007). By incorporating cultural identity perception as a psychological mediator in the gourmet tourism contexts, the study develops positive associations between cultural identity perception, satisfaction, destination attachment and revisit intention (Lin et al., 2011; Stylidis et al., 2017). Through this methodology, the symbolic interactionist perspective is broadened and how culinary practices can be used as means of self-identification and intercultural communication is illustrated. The findings do highlight the mediating role of satisfaction in the formation of post consumption behaviours in addition to using destination attachment (DA) to emphasise the emotional and relational loyalty factors that the rational intentions models frequently overlook (Ajzen, 1991; Oliver, 1980). The defining step of DA - RV route indicates the value of genuine cultural interaction in developing long-term loyalty (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

The present research has a contribution to the theoretical discussion since the studies employ these frameworks in a politically sensitive and unexplored region Kashmir Valley. It outlines the potential value of culinary tradition as a strong and integrating tourism resource - the generation of economic attraction, cultural solidity, and intercultural awareness, even in regions where violence occurs.

The results provide significant evidence to the tourism planners and destination marketing organisations. Tourism can be strengthened by integrating structured Wazwan-based experiences into destination marketing in the promotion strategies so as to increase the destination differentiation and cultural authenticity. Preservation of culinary heritage should thus be encouraged by policymakers and hospitality stakeholders when crafting experience tourism products that will enable users to engage in food culture that is culturally significant.

This paper is relevant to the literature in gastronomy tourism since it has shown that the experiences of culinary heritage have an effect on tourist behaviour based on psychological processes of cultural identity perception and destination attachment. The study employs the experiential consumption theory, applies symbolic interactionism within a culinary tourism context, expectation confirmation theory, and the theory of planned behaviour as means of providing a holistic framework in understanding how ritualised culinary experiences turn cultural heritage into behavioural loyalty.

7. Managerial and Policy Implications

The results of the present study have a series of practical managerial and policy implications that can further improve culinary heritage tourism especially in culturally sensitive and developing areas like the Kashmir Valley. The findings are relevant to destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and other tourism stakeholders (e.g., heritage boards, tourism entrepreneurs, and public authorities) in terms of the

need to position Wazwan as a core branding approach, exploiting its cultural symbolism and sensory experience to develop unique selling points in marketing, themed travel packages, and gastronomic experiences. Incorporating cultural narrative and food trails into the marketing can offer an alternative to the standard tourism products and enhance the experiences of the tourists visiting Kashmir. Considering the high impact of the cultural identity perception on satisfaction and loyalty, tourism planners ought to focus on more authentic and community-based experiences by engaging local Wazas, artisans and storytellers in order to create meaningful tourist-host experiences. The quality of the whole gastronomic experience such as food preparation and service, ambiance, and cultural context will be further enforced to boost destination attachment and revisit intentions, so the areas of intervention will be hospitality training, infrastructure investment, and hygiene assurance.

The established correlation between emotional attachment and repeat visitation indicates that cultivation of affective relations with the help of interactive cooking classes shared dinners, and storytelling evenings could result in long-term loyalty with the help of post-visit online interaction and focused culinary event programmes. Lastly, culinary heritage tourism ought to be a part of wider regional development and peacebuilding approaches, since it provides a low-impact, high-value, economic inclusion strategy, cultural preservation strategy, and image restoration strategy in conflict-impacted situations. Through managing the convergence of gastronomy and sustainable tourism policies, skills upgrading programs, and the heritage conservation systems, the stakeholders will be able to market Wazwan as a source of culinary tourism as well as a source of cultural resiliency and socioeconomic rejuvenation.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The research fits into the body of existing literature in experiential and culinary tourism, especially where the region studied is culturally rich yet underexplored, like the Kashmir Valley. This research, similar to any other empirical research, has limitations of its own and in this case, broadening of this study would help in further research. Kashmir Valley is a special case which is characterized by its peculiar socio-political and religious situation. This limitation could limit the generalisation of the results of other regions, but it implies that the application of the tested model in culturally rich or post-conflict areas such as Northeast India, Balkans or North Africa would give relevant empirical data to cross-cultural validation. The cross-sectional nature of the study only captures the perceptions of tourists at one point in time, and the retrospective recollection can present memory bias in the determination of levels of satisfaction, and therefore needs a longitudinal or experimental design to determine the long term impacts of culinary experiences. The number of participants (348) is adequate to conduct PLS-SEM, but the non-probability purposeful sampling method also leaves the possibility of self-selection bias. Future studies can take into consideration the application of stratified random sampling of domestic and foreign markets and the use of multi-group analysis of how demographic characteristics and motivations affect sample differences. In spite of the fact that this model is very effective in terms of its explanatory power, it fails to take into account the possible moderating variables, including novelty-seeking behaviour, food neophobia, and travel frequency.

Finally, quantitative methods, though advantageous in terms of hypothesis testing, may fail to capture the complexity of food experiences in terms of emotions and symbolism. By incorporating qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, narrative analysis and ethnographic observation or taking a mixed-methods design, one could gain a deeper contextual insight and provide a more holistic view on the interaction, memory, and perception of Wazwan as a cultural and culinary phenomenon by travellers.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that culinary heritage is a significant driver in influencing the outcomes of experiential tourism. The results prove that the involvement in the traditional Wazwan experience of cuisine has a positive impact on the cultural identity perception, satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intentions of tourists. The study verifies the hypothesis that culinary heritage experiences go beyond simple food consumption. Using a thorough Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) framework, the researchers confirm that the culinary heritage experiences are immersive and symbolically rich rather than merely acts of eating. It is through the combination of four complementary theoretical perspectives namely, the experiential consumption theory, the symbolic interaction theory, the expectation confirmation theory, and the theory of planned behaviour that a multidimensional lens is created through which the mechanisms that play out

between the experiences of culinary heritage and the loyalty of tourists can be more easily illustrated. The confirmed routes, especially the one between satisfaction and destination attachment and the one in between attachment and revisit intention, highlight the point that tourism loyalty is as much affected by emotional attachments as it is by rational considerations. In addition to the theoretical implications, the study also provides practical implications on destination branding and theoretical planning in sustainable tourism, as the systematic inclusion of the concept of culinary heritage as an ingredient of promotional and experiential practices has proven particularly effective in the case of culturally rich under-represented areas. The Wazwan experience can be regarded as a model of how gastronomy can be used as a cultural memory, as a way of community engagement, and as a mechanism of socio-cultural sustainability. This ultimately confirms the transformative power of food in tourism not merely as a consumable product, but as a cultural junction that connects the visitor to place, meaning and common heritage, placing culinary history as a strategic, authentic and sustainable source of tourist participation and loyalty.

Declarations

Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests.

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Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of ethical research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI statement

Generative AI tools were used only in a limited and controlled manner for language editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the authors.

Author's Contributions

S. Chowdhary (0000-0001-9192-2737): *Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Writing*.

N. Kumar (0000-0002-3325-3448): *Review, Editing, Data Analysis*.

A. Ghaus (0009-0005-9731-2186): *Data Collection, Data Curation, Writing*.

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