

Capturing the Economic Value of Mzansi's Local Cuisine Through Storytelling in Tourism

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Abstract: Mzansi, the colloquial name for South Africa (SA) (from the Xhosa noun uMzantzi, meaning "South"), has a vast and varied national cuisine, known as the Rainbow Cuisine, that is relatively unexplored. The 2nd UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa, Arusha, identified the need to strengthen local food ecosystems as a top priority, suggesting engagement with producers, the safeguarding of culinary heritage through the promotion and use of native crops, documentation of products, processes and traditional recipes, and more sustainable food systems. In other research, Local Economic Development (LED) has demonstrated that using local food can drive a destination's competitiveness, add value to local economies, and foster tourism loyalty through high satisfaction with gastronomic offerings. The aim of this research was to present the local food-related travel tendencies of SA tourists, with a view to making recommendations to food entrepreneurs. An electronic questionnaire was made available to local South African tourists through Qualtrics. It included a demographic section to ensure participation by South African residents living and travelling locally, as well as a second section to record personal travel tendencies. Of the 276 valid responses, 97.5% indicated that they always/sometimes search for local foods when travelling locally, while 72.8% visited a local independent restaurant and 52% a food market. Our results indicate that each traveller had a mean of 4.33 (on a 5-point Likert scale) food related activities during their travels, that they were willing to try new foods ($m = 4.37$); purchase local food to take home ($m = 4.29$); can remember the food they consumed during their travels ($m = 4.29$); enjoy eating new foods ($m = 4.27$), and read up about places to eat before commencing with travels ($m = 4.17$). Local tourists' curiosity about other cultures' food ($m = 4.16$) and their desire to eat where locals eat ($m = 4.16$) were also highly important. These results clearly demonstrate the advantages, importance, and multiple benefits of local and cultural foods, along with storytelling, that food and hospitality entrepreneurs can utilise in their marketing and offerings to harness economic benefits and build national pride, thereby delivering broader, even inter-regional, socio-economic benefits.

Keywords: Local Food Tourism, Storytelling, Travel, Local Economy, Experience Economy.

1. Introduction and Background

Global tourism has finally returned to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Tourist arrivals increased by 33.4% from 2022 to 2023 (UNWTO 2025), and in 2024, an estimated 1.4 billion overnight international tourists were recorded, surpassing pre-COVID levels.

Tourism makes a significant contribution to economies, and most countries make substantial efforts to advance both international and local tourism. Local food ecosystems were a top priority at the 2025 2nd UN Tourism Regional Forum, making the need to strengthen gastronomy tourism a clear goal for Africa (UNTourism 2025) and SA. As part of the South African government's National Development Plan, the South African Department of Tourism has recognised tourism as a pillar of the country's economy, providing 1.3 million jobs and contributing 6.8% of GDP in 2023 (GCIS 2024). With domestic travel contributing an estimated 38 million domestic trips worth ZAR 121 billion (GCIS 2024), its potential to stimulate economic growth and transformation is evident. The Department of Tourism has identified several upcoming niche markets, namely Wine-, Heritage Culture-, Township-, and Domestic Tourism. Specifically, the "Sho't Left" campaign, launched in 2007, focuses on locals travelling to towns and provinces in their own country (GCIS 2024). The South African Yearbook 2023/24 Tourism (GCIS 2024) provides a comprehensive summary of attractions by province and town; however, the document does not refer to dining spaces, food, or ingredients as the main attractions. Herein lies the missed opportunity identified by the Tourism Forum.

Strengthening local food ecosystems is another top priority (UNTourism 2025), through safeguarding culinary heritage, by promoting the use of native crops, documenting products, processes, and traditional recipes, and promoting more sustainable food systems. LED has also demonstrated that using local food can drive a destination's competitiveness (Ndlovu 2023) by adding value to the local economy. Furthermore, tourism loyalty can be achieved through high satisfaction with gastronomic offerings (Berbel-Pineda et al. 2019). SA's Gastronomy Tourism Framework (Department.of.Tourism 2023) has been in a development/implementation phase for the past six years (Capazorio 2023). Hospitality and tourism stakeholders have called for urgency to

move from strategy to implementation, facilitating the enhancement of travel offerings in the domestic tourism market, stimulating job creation, and unlocking the untapped potential of food tourism in SA.

Mzansi, a conversational term for SA (derived from the Xhosa noun uMzantzi, meaning “South”), has a considerable and varied but largely unexplored national cuisine, often referred to as the Rainbow Cuisine (Fisher and Du Rand 2024, Snyman 2004), that is on offer to local and international tourists.

The Experience Economy (EE), first introduced in the 1990s by Pine and Gilmore (1999), has developed into a well-known model for creating value in tourism. In a previous study (Fisher et al. 2025), the effect of tourists’ experiences in food tourism in SA was quantified, and it was found that none of the 276 respondents achieved the “sweet spot” effect as prescribed by the EE Model, missing this window of opportunity.

The aim of this research was to present the tendencies and importance of local cuisine to local South African tourists in order to make recommendations to local food entrepreneurs. The current research, therefore, explored how tourism businesses can leverage the EE for economic gain by utilising storytelling and creating experiences that become synonymous with tourists’ identities, enabling them to become active and intentional actors in their own travel stories.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Local Tourism

Domestic tourism is defined as tourism by residents within the country’s economic territory (Hall and Lew 2009). Like most other forms of tourism, it involves the development and promotion of local tourism activities, such as cultural, historical, and natural attractions, as well as specialisations like culinary or gastro tourism. It offers substantial opportunities for community empowerment and economic growth (Ramukumba 2019), strengthening cultural preservation and community identity. Consequently, it plays a vital role in promoting local economic development and supporting employment opportunities.

Culinary or gastrotourism can be leveraged by rural areas to achieve economic growth and foster local identity by offering local tourists opportunities to experience local cuisine and engage in food-related activities, events, and experiences. Such initiatives not only generate revenue for local businesses (Bain 2024) and support the foodservice industry in both cities and small towns through providing a unique ‘place-based’ food experience, but they can also preserve culinary heritage. Culinary tourism contributes to job creation, increases the demand for local ingredients, creates sustainable income for local economies, and enhances community identity and cultural pride (Bain 2024).

2.2 South African Gastro Tourism Attractions

Culinary tourism in SA exhibits a growing sector with domestic food/beverage spend at ZAR 5.5 billion (2022), and an income of ZAR 99 billion (2022) in the food and beverage industry, with an increased income of 8.2% annually (Statssa 2025). Fine dining is also a contributing factor, with three restaurants on the 2025 World’s 100 Best list (Anderson 2025).

Successful examples of gastro tourism attractions in SA include:

- Cape Malay food and cooking classes in the Bo-Kaap of Cape Town, in terms of which researcher Allyson Ang (2015) quotes Maggie Mouton in Bo-Kaap Kitchen (Fraser and Webb 2013) saying that “The Cape Muslims, strongly bound by their religion, and blessed with an affinity for and a love of cooking, have created and managed to retain a strong identity”. This is an excellent example of how the story of Cape Malay slavery and oppression became integral in the construction of Cape Malay identity and food, strengthened by author Cariema Isaacs (2016), who says, “...what I learned from my father was even more valuable – he taught me *why* we cook”;
- Seafood Beach Braais are mostly all-you-can-eat fresh seafood feasts, cooked over open fires right on the beach in places such as Paternoster on the West Coast. Food journalist Tony Jackman (2021) writes, “Potjies brimful of seafood; kreef braaing on a grid somewhere, whole fish on another, piles of pertly pink prawns” about his experience at Muisbosskerm at Lamberts Bay;
- Other examples include The Oyster Cooking and Shucking competition (7 July 2026) (De Bruin 2025), the Groot Marico Mampoer Festival, trout fly-fishing in Dullstroom, the Durban “Bunny Chow” hunt, Macadamia nut farm tours in Hazyview, and a Zulu Cuisine Cooking Experience presented by ‘Kasi Taste’

chef Phumlani Mthembu at WOWZULU Marketplace in Ballito, which includes steamed bread and amadumbi.

Even though the examples above detail successful gastro tourism attractions, they are but a fraction of the many unexplored cultural foods to be explored in SA:

- The craze for ostrich feathers in late 1800s fashion led to the establishment of Oudtshoorn's feather industry, creating ostrich barons famous for their over-the-top ostrich palaces. As the demand for ostrich feathers declined, ostrich farming transitioned from producing feathers to the current ostrich meat industry, which could include ostrich biltong-making lessons, ostrich egg frying competitions, or ostrich-egg-and-spoon races (see Figure 1 for the size of an ostrich egg). Even though interest in geotourism (Rogerson and Rogerson 2024) may be limited, the economic value of including food from the Klein Karoo region has yet to be explored;



Figure 1: Size relation of an ostrich egg (author's own)

- Some township gastro tourism experiences exist, such as authentic Shisa Nyama (a local braai or BBQ) and other eateries along Vilakazi Street in Soweto; there is scope for expansion. The seven women from the Imizamo Yethu neighbourhood in Cape Town's Hout Bay, who contributed to *Molokoane Street: Cooking is heaven when living is hard* (Elliott 2024), could enjoy similar benefits by marketing gastro tourism experiences in their suburb, telling their stories of looking out for each other and sharing their personal stories and recipes;
- Other unexplored gastrotourism experiences include sultana drying in the Orange River Delta, Kalahari truffle (*Kalaharituber pfeilii*) hunting with San people, or utilisation of the more than 850 edible seaweed flora.

2.3 Storytelling

Unique experiences are a key driver in the tourism industry, which is entering an 'experiences-as-identity' era (Gilbert-Jones 2024). Many culinary tourism experiences are worth travelling for, as they create or reinforce an identity (Haris 2025) beyond merely providing a service to tourists.

Storytelling plays a significant role in enhancing the experience economy in culinary tourism by creating immersive, memorable experiences that connect tourists to a destination's cultural and culinary heritage (Nurwitasari et al. 2024). Baker (2025) argues that the future of tourism lies in storytelling. Storytelling involves

sharing narratives about a place, its people, history, and culture, and can be expressed in various ways, including visually, digitally, and verbally (Garcês 2024). Successful storytelling often leads to an emotional connection between the tourist and the event, character, or place, transforming a consumption activity into a meaningful experiential encounter (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Mossberg, 2007).

This integration of storytelling into culinary tourism not only enriches the tourist experience but also supports local economies and cultural preservation. The EE framework, which emphasises the creation of memorable and engaging experiences, is particularly relevant in culinary tourism, where storytelling can transform a simple meal into a cultural journey. The value of storytelling lies in its ability to provide tourists with a deeper, more memorable understanding of the local gastronomy, thereby enhancing their knowledge of the food culture of the specific destination and its community (Rahayuningsih et al. 2025). Moreira et al. (2025) distinguish between destination-based storytelling and tourist-based storytelling, in which the latter enables tourists to share their stories and contribute to the creation of identity within the EE, thereby making the tourist experience a reflection of the destination's identity.

2.4 Experience Economy

The Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy (EE) model has been widely applied and validated across diverse sectors of the tourism industry, including sporting events (Coetzee et al. 2019), wine tourism (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2012), and various festivals (Mehmetoglu and Engen 2011, Park et al. 2010, Chirakranont and Sunanta 2021). In South Africa, the EE scale (Oh et al. 2007) has been applied to retail, guesthouses, museums, and food tourism (Cassel et al. 2021, Coetzee 2015, Radder and Han 2015, Fisher et al. 2025). Recent food-related research includes studies on Vietnamese culinary experiences (Hoang 2023) and P2P dining (Mhlanga 2024), with future trends shifting toward transformative experiences (Flores-Gómez et al. 2025).

This study utilises the four EE dimensions to explore culinary storytelling and the "sweet spot" of optimal experience (Leung et al. 2023):

1. **Education:** Involves active skill acquisition or passive knowledge gain (Oh et al. 2007). Stories about historical methods or a chef's heritage create emotional connections to the techniques being taught.
2. **Entertainment:** Passive enjoyment as an audience member (Oh et al. 2007). Narratives regarding generational history or local traditions—conveyed verbally or through galleries—enhance the observation of local activities (Kusumah and Andrianto 2023).
3. **Escapism:** Active immersion where tourists temporarily leave their daily routines or identities (Leung et al. 2023). Storytelling facilitates this by encouraging self-identification with local characters (Kusumah and Andrianto 2023).
4. **Aesthetics:** Passive immersion in the physical environment, including décor, sounds and smells (Oh et al. 2007). Storytellers highlight these sensory attributes to forge realistic, emotional links to the destination (Kusumah and Andrianto 2023).

3. Methodology

The original EE model has been extensively tested and adapted for various settings (Oh et al. 2007, Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2012, Pine and Gilmore 2011, Coetzee 2015). Most recently, Fisher et al. (2025) successfully used it to describe the local tourists' experiences with local food. This section was guided by dissonance theory (Festinger 1962) to examine the value of local food for local travellers. The EE was selected as a suitable methodology because it aligns with the concept of Storytelling and has been applied to various tourism experiences. The same adapted scale was applied using a Qualtrics online questionnaire, focusing on the travel tendencies and experiences of local travellers travelling within the nine provinces of SA. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed and piloted (n = 10) in November 2024 to minimise errors. In December 2024, 276 complete and valid responses were collected through convenience and snowball sampling. The survey link was initially sent to colleagues' mailing lists, who were asked to share it. The survey included demographic questions, 27 Likert-scale statements (a 5-point agreement scale) on their personal travel tendencies, and several open-ended questions about the details of a recent culinary experience. Respondents rated their local food experience using 24 adapted Likert-scale items based on four EE dimensions. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and thematic coding were used for qualitative data analysis. The adapted EE scale was validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and descriptive analyses were employed to explore the travel tendencies of local tourists in the South. A T-test was used to compare the effect of storytelling on the tourist experience, using the EE model.

4. Results

The sample consisted of 199 females and 75 males, mostly from the Millennials and GenX cohorts (see Table 1). Approximately sixty-one per cent (60.9%) reported holding an undergraduate qualification, while 39.1% held a postgraduate qualification.

Additionally, 87.7% of participants had travelled locally for recreational purposes within the past three years; 11.2% travelled locally annually or less, 18.8% travelled once a year, 25.7% travelled twice a year, 19.6% travelled three times a year, and 24.9% travelled four or more times a year, confirming that the sample comprised more *regular* travellers than not. This is consistent with the Consumer insights agency KLA's finding that 79% of South Africans are passionate about travelling (KLA 2025) and 81% agree that "you can only truly get to know a country by experiencing its culture", including "local cuisine (and) community interaction".

Furthermore, 6.5% of respondents stated they travelled locally solely for business purposes, 56.9% for pleasure, and 36.6% for both. When asked about local food preferences during their travels, 51.8% indicated that they always seek out local foods, 45.7% said they sometimes do, while 2.5% reported that they never do.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile (n= 276)		Frequency	Percent
Age	Gen Z 1997-2012	35	12.7
	Millennials/Gen Y 1981-1996	90	32.6
	Gen X 1965-1980	94	34.1
	Boomers 1946-1964	56	20.3
	Silent Gen 1928-1945	1	0.4
Gender	Male	75	27.2
	Female	199	72.1
	Prefer not to say	2	0.7
Level of Education	Grade 10	3	1.1
	Grade 12	30	10.9
	Diploma/ Certificate	69	25.0
	Bachelor's degree	66	23.9
	Honour's degree	50	18.1
	Master's degree	35	12.7
	Doctoral degree	23	8.3
Ethnic Group	Black	60	21.7
	Coloured	10	3.6
	Indian	3	1.1
	White	201	72.8
	African Swati	1	0.4
	Afrikaans	1	0.4
	Other	2	0.7
Have you travelled for recreational purposes within the borders of South Africa within the last 3 years?	Yes	242	87.7
	No	34	12.3
How often do you travel locally within South Africa per year?	Less than once a year	31	11.2
	Once a year	52	18.8
	Twice a year	71	25.7
	Three times a year	54	19.6

Demographic Profile (n= 276)		Frequency	Percent
Four or more times a year		68	24.6
When you travel locally, do you seek out local foods?	Yes, always	143	51.8
	Sometimes	126	45.7
	Never	7	2.5
Purpose of Travel	Business	18	6.5
	Leisure	157	56.9
	Both Business and Leisure	101	36.6

To determine local tourists’ preferences and tendencies, respondents had to select responses from a 5-point Likert Scale (5 = Strongly Agree) for 27 unique statements. One reverse-coded item (9) was removed to improve the scale's reliability, resulting in an α value greater than 0.800. Overall, the scale indicated that respondents place above-average importance on food experiences during a trip ($m = 3.579$). Almost all respondents ($m = 4.17$) *read about recommended, famous, and popular places to eat*. While most respondents *planned their activities prior to the trip* ($m = 3.759$), *fewer planned their actual dining experiences* ($m = 3.45$). This agrees with the KLA’s report that 76% of South Africans enjoy planning and researching their holidays (KLA 2025).

Respondents indicated that they are *willing to try* ($m = 4.37$) and *enjoy* ($m = 4.27$) *new foods*, are *likely to purchase food* items to take home ($m = 4.29$) and can specifically *remember the food they ate* ($m = 4.29$). Regarding the various cuisines offered in SA, many are curious about the food of *other South African cultures* ($m = 4.16$) and want to *eat where locals eat* ($m = 4.16$).

Most respondents self-identified as *foodies* and *tend to have positive experiences with food as indicated by their engagement with food experiences* ($m = 4.004$), and the statements below, *‘I am always willing to try new foods’* ($m = 4.37$); *‘I am curious about food from other cultures’* ($m = 4.16$). *‘I consider myself a foodie’* ($m = 3.87$), I like *‘trying out foods that are local’* ($m = 3.88$), and I follow *foodies* ($m = 3.62$) or *celebrity chefs* ($m = 3.38$) on social media. Additional details about the sample’s personal travel tendencies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Personal Tendencies when travelling

ITEMS (n=276)	Item Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Deviation (SD)	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Scale Label/ Scale Mean
(7) I am likely to purchase locally produced food or beverages to take home	4.29	0.92	0.850	Importance of food during trip $m=3.579$
(21) I can remember the food I ate during my travels	4.29	0.91		
(27) When I travel, I want to eat where the locals eat	4.16	1.04		
(24) I follow foodies on social media	3.62	1.39		
(26) I have purchased or own old recipe books to find local and cultural recipes	3.58	1.38		
(20) When I travel, I intentionally ask the waitron/shopkeeper/guide about local foods	3.51	1.21		
(23) I follow celebrity chefs who introduce and discuss ingredients or meals that have cultural importance	3.38	1.35		
(2) The availability of local foods is generally more important to me than non-local foods when choosing a local travel destination	3.32	1.22		
(18) The accessibility of local foods is a factor when I decide to travel	3.07	1.20		
(9) I seldom worry about local foods when choosing a local travel destination	3.06	1.22		
(19) I have locally imported/ordered food/couriered food items to me of places that I have visited in the past	2.75	1.46		

ITEMS (n=276)	Item Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Deviation (SD)	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Scale Label/ Scale Mean
(4) Before I travel, I read about recommended, famous, and popular places to eat.	4.17	1.08	0.808	Planning prior to trip m=3.759
(10) Before I travel, I read up on adventure attractions	3.97	1.09		
(5) Before I travel, I read up about family attractions to visit	3.86	1.13		
(3) Before I travel, I read up on festivals/events happening	3.79	1.15		
(12) Before I travel, I have an idea of foods I want to taste	3.70	1.08		
(22) I like to read articles about food history and cultural foods	3.58	1.34		
(1) Before I travel, I read up about the historical places in the area	3.56	1.20		
(11) Before I travel, I already plan where I will dine	3.45	1.17		
(13) I am always willing to try new foods	4.37	0.87	0.879	Engagement with food m=4.004
(8) I enjoy eating foods that are new to me	4.27	0.93		
(15) I am curious about food from other local cultures	4.16	1.02		
(17) When I travel, I am intentional about trying out foods that are local	3.88	1.04		
(14) I consider myself a foodie	3.87	1.11		
(6) I intend to return to a destination I visited previously to experience the local food	3.83	1.05		
(16) When I travel, I choose to eat local dishes rather than something familiar	3.83	1.10		
(25) I have tried to prepare cultural dishes at home	3.80	1.28		
(9) I seldom worry about local foods when choosing a local travel destination	Item removed			

The 276 experiences reported were qualitatively analysed for elements of storytelling that enriched the traveller’s experience. 152 respondents described experiences with one or more elements of storytelling (a narrative about people, places, culture, or an event) in which the tour guide, host, or presenter used a narrative to build a rich story around the food tourism activity. To combat selective recall among respondents, the researchers avoided directly asking about storytelling and instead asked, *In which other food-related activity or experience did you partake?* There was a clear distinction between activities that included storytelling and those in which respondents did not report any elements. One respondent described her experience as *“Attended the honey and mead festival”*, which seems quite unimpressive and does not provide evidence of storytelling against another respondent who stated *“The Boma mock marriage ceremony, with food & dances were fascinating”*. Other examples include the host sharing stories of their grandmothers in the kitchen, or wine farm tour guides telling stories about the families who have lived on the farm for decades.

One respondent reported their experience in the Western Cape town of Kommetjie, where they joined a guided township tour to see murals, which concluded with a traditional meal at a local home. These tours are known to include the oldest township in SA, and tour guides share the stories and history of the community’s art, music, and food. Another respondent reported eating *“skaapstertjies, Goat stew, Kerrievis, Kabeljou, Roosterkoekies, (and) Babotie”* during their trip to Springbok in the Northern Cape. They wrote, *“I had the privilege of spending time with Ouma Lalie, who was a Koi San, in her 90s and could still speak the original language. She told me a great deal about many of the traditional local foods which she grew up with.”* One respondent travelled to Kwa-Zulu Natal, the homeland of the Zulus, and experienced a *“mock marriage ceremony”* and ate *“Lots of venison (new tastes, marinated) at a boma braai, pap, (and) interesting condiments”*.

To examine the effect of storytelling on the EE dimensions, an independent-sample T-test was conducted to determine whether participants who experienced storytelling differed significantly from those who did not when rating the four EE dimensions. Levene’s test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for **entertainment** ($p = .073$) and **escapism** ($p = .371$), but not for **education** ($p = .009$) or **aesthetics** ($p = .001$). For the latter two variables, the results from the unequal-variance estimates are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Effect of Storytelling

Dimension	Entertainment	Education	Escapism	Aesthetics
Storytelling				
<i>N</i>	152	152	151	152
Mean	3.9561	4.0044	3.7252	4.3526
SD	.82651	.80468	.79190	.63943
No Storytelling				
<i>N</i>	123	123	124	124
Mean	3.6165	3.4661	3.2876	3.8435
SD	.96735	1.00067	.89370	.85295
<i>T</i>	-3.139	-4.834	-4.302	-5.503
<i>Df</i>	273	232*	273	223*
<i>P</i>	0.002	<.001	<.001	<.001
Mean Diff.	-.33961	-.53826	-.43753	-.50908
95% CI of Diff.	[-0.55, -0.13]	[-0.76, -0.32]	[-0.64, -0.24]	[-0.69, -0.33]

Participants who had not experienced storytelling (M = 3.62, SD = 0.97) rated entertainment significantly lower than those who had experienced storytelling (M = 3.96, SD = 0.83), $t(273) = -3.14, p = .002$. The mean difference was -0.34 (95% CI [-0.55, -0.13]).

For Education, there was a significant difference in perceived educational value between participants with and without storytelling exposure. Those without storytelling reported lower scores (M = 3.47, SD = 1.00) compared to those with storytelling (M = 4.00, SD = 0.80), $t(\approx 232) = -4.83, p < .001$. The mean difference was -0.54 (95% CI [-0.76, -0.32]).

In the Escapism dimension, a significant difference was found: participants who had not experienced storytelling reported lower levels (M = 3.29, SD = 0.89) than those who had (M = 3.73, SD = 0.79), $t(273) = -4.30, p < .001$. The mean difference was -0.44 (95% CI [-0.64, -0.24]).

Participants without storytelling exposure rated Aesthetics significantly lower (M = 3.84, SD = 0.85) than those with storytelling (M = 4.35, SD = 0.64). Due to heterogeneity of variances, corrected values were used, $t(\approx 223) = -5.50, p < .001$. The mean difference was -0.51 (95% CI [-0.69, -0.33]).

Only 5 respondents (1.8%) reported the maximum score for all EE dimensions.

5. Discussion

South Africans are shown to be curious and intentional about wine and culinary tourism. They often travel locally more than twice a year and take care to research and plan their culinary experiences. More than half of the sample reported storytelling as part of the culinary activity, which significantly improved travellers' experience across all EE dimensions, yet only five in the sample reportedly achieved the sweet spot effect (Pine and Gilmore 1999, Fisher et al. 2025). Storytelling is therefore an effective way to create experiences that enhance the EE's dimensions.

Business storytelling also helps improve engagement and credibility when done correctly (Gitonga 2022). It is therefore recommended that culinary tourism businesses utilise stories about heritage, history, cultural significance, or societal importance to establish the context for their culinary offerings. In all types of food-related tourism activities, the hosts, servers and tour guides seemed to play an important role in creating a curated experience and should be trained to become effective storytellers.

6. Conclusion and Further Research

The results indicated that most South African travellers travelling locally place significant importance on food and dining experiences, although this may not be the main purpose of the trip.

All respondents successfully remembered food and culinary tourism experiences, which appear to have had a significant effect on the overall success of the trip.

Most travellers did not achieve the highest levels in each experience dimension, indicating opportunities for improvement.

Storytelling enhanced the experience and provided tourists with a deeper, more memorable understanding of local gastronomy, facilitating tourist-based storytelling that moves beyond destination-based storytelling.

From this research, the economic value to anyone involved in the food value chain operating within the Local Tourism realm is evident. It is, however, important to note that currently, few local tourism players fully capture the economic value of Mzansi's local cuisine in tourism, and that much more economic and socio-economic benefits may be harnessed from improving local food offerings, particularly through incorporating storytelling.

Further research is necessary to establish the value of storytelling in culinary tourism and to determine local businesses' ability to implement it to improve culinary tourism experiences. Future research should focus on objectively investigating the presence and impact of storytelling on both tourists and businesses.

6.1 Limitations

This sample consists mainly of white females and is not representative of the general population of domestic tourists in SA. Furthermore, the results of the study are limited to recalled experiences, which are subject to memory bias, or the Rosy Retrospection Phenomena, where people often tend to reflect on the past as more positive than at the time of the event, with this cognitive bias increasing as time goes on (Adler and Pansky 2020). The authors also acknowledge the subjective classification of storytelling as a limitation to this study.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, University of Pretoria, number NAS134/2019.

AI Declaration

During the preparation of this work, the authors utilised Grammarly to enhance readability and verify grammar. After using Grammarly, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed, taking full responsibility for the publication's content and the validity of the information presented.

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