

# Exploring the Cuisines of Iloilo: A Guide to Culinary Heritage in a UNESCO Creative City

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**Abstract:** The primary objective of this study was to develop an illustrative food guide focusing on noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. The guide aimed to highlight Iloilo City's culinary heritage, promote cultural preservation, support sustainable tourism development, and contribute to long-term economic growth. Data were collected through a focus group discussion with 25 participants, selected purposively and conveniently, including stakeholders, local chefs, community entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists. Thematic analysis, complemented by visualization tools, was employed to identify recurring themes and concepts embedded in the study. The findings reveal that noodles and soup dishes, most notably the iconic *La Paz Batchoy*, reflecting the city's history, exemplify rice-based delicacies, such as *Baye-baye*, highlighting the Ilonggos' creative use of indigenous ingredients. Baked goods, including *Biscocho*, illustrate the dynamic interplay between tradition and modern tastes. Collectively, these culinary expressions underscore food's role as a living heritage, capturing historical interactions, community resilience, and the evolving cultural values of the Ilonggo people. The proposed food guide is envisioned as a strategic instrument for tourism promotion, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Aligned with Iloilo's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, this initiative emphasizes the transformative potential of food-based tourism to empower local communities, celebrate cultural identity, and position Iloilo as a premier culinary destination both nationally and internationally.

**Keywords:** UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Culinary Heritage, Illustrative Food Guide

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is a primary marker of identity, and cultural heritage reflects a community's way of life. While heritage is often associated with historical sites, language, and the arts, food is one of the most dynamic mediums through which culture is expressed, preserved, and transmitted across generations. The people who live in Iloilo, whether in the city or the province, are called Ilonggo. This term refers to both the province's residents and the local ethnolinguistic group, reflecting their shared language, culture, and community practices (Jocano, 2024/1983). Traditional recipes, cooking techniques, and dining practices embody collective memory and identity, making gastronomy a living expression of history rather than mere sustenance. In Iloilo City, food plays a central role in sustaining cultural continuity and fostering social and economic development. Despite Iloilo City's de Therefore, preserving culinary heritage holds both cultural and economic value. Blanza (2025) emphasized that safeguarding gastronomy can stimulate local economies through culinary events, foster collaboration within the hospitality sector, promote sustainable practices, and address challenges in sourcing local ingredients. Beyond economics, gastronomy connects individuals to their heritage. Soeroso and Turgarini (2020) define gastronomy as encompassing the origins, preparation, and cultural meanings of food, while Lallen (2024) showed that gastronomy shapes Iloilo's cultural identity and enhances tourist experiences, influencing destination choices and revisit intentions. Iloilo City became the first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2023), recognizing its culinary traditions shaped by indigenous roots, Spanish colonial influence, and Western practices in 2023. Other UNESCO Creative Cities, such as Jeonju in South Korea, demonstrate how gastronomy supports heritage preservation and sustainable tourism. Food has become a primary travel motivation, with local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, value, cost, and risk significantly shaping tourist experiences (Carpio, Napod, & Do, 2021). Globally, gastronomy tourism enhances destination competitiveness and cultural differentiation (Dirlik & Karsavuran, 2019; Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). The World Food Travel Association (2020) reported that travelers allocate a substantial portion of their budget to food-related experiences. Despite Iloilo City's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, there remains a lack of a systematically documented and illustrative food guide that captures its iconic dishes and their cultural meanings. Research has shifted toward experiential perspectives (Richards, 2021), alongside technological transformations in food systems (Yikmiş et al., 2024). Within this context, developing a food guide for Iloilo City is timely. Such a guide can document traditions at risk of loss (Bessièrè, 2013), promote sustainable tourism (Elliset al., 2018; Okumus, 2021), and strengthen community identity and pride (Everett & Slocum, 20213). This study aims to develop a food guide that supports cultural preservation and sustainable tourism.

## **2. Research Questions**

This study examined the rich culinary heritage of Iloilo City, Philippines, with a focus on its noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. It aimed to develop an illustrative food guide to the city's gastronomy that would serve as a resource for cultural preservation, tourism promotion, and sustainable local development.

1. What iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods define Iloilo City of Gastronomy, and in what ways do they represent the city's culinary heritage?
2. What illustrative food guide may be developed that reflects Iloilo City's culinary heritage and the identified iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods?

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in the Tourism Destination Image Theory, which explains how tourists form mental representations of a destination that incorporate both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive dimension refers to visitors' beliefs and knowledge about the attributes of a place, such as Iloilo's iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. The affective dimension pertains to the emotions and feelings that these culinary experiences evoke, such as excitement, comfort, or nostalgia. When combined, these two components create a holistic image of the destination, influencing tourists' overall impressions, visit intentions, and behavioral outcomes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). In the case of Iloilo City, its recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy strengthens its induced image through official promotions and food-related initiatives, while organic sources such as word-of-mouth, culinary blogs, and festival experiences further reinforce its reputation as a culinary hub (Iloilo City Government, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Food thus becomes a symbolic marker of place identity, contributing to the city's global destination image and distinguishing it from other tourism markets (Wang, 2023). Framing Iloilo's culinary heritage through Tourism Destination Image Theory, this study positions the proposed illustrative food guide as a contextual representation of Iloilo City of Gastronomy, aimed at preserving culinary heritage and promoting sustainable local development.

## **4. Literature Review**

Iloilo City, often referred to as the "City of Love," is renowned for its warm hospitality and Ilonggo's deep appreciation for their cultural heritage, particularly their culinary traditions. The city is highly urbanized in Western Visayas, with an estimated population of 473,728 in 2024, making it one of the most populous cities in the region. Its economy is service-oriented, driven by commerce and trade, education, tourism, real estate, BPO, and hospitality. Tourism is a major contributor, with attractions such as historic churches, the Iloilo River Esplanade, and festivals like Dinagyang and Paraw Regatta, alongside its recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. In 2024, the city recorded 1,001,028 tourist arrivals, a 12.95% increase from 2023, reflecting a strong tourism recovery (Iloilo Metropolitan Times, 2025). UNESCO (2023) notes that the city's recognition as the first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in the Philippines underscores its rich gastronomic culture. The culinary landscape of Iloilo is a tapestry woven from indigenous practices, Spanish colonial influences, and Chinese trade. This fusion has given rise to distinctive dishes, each telling a story of the city's history and cultural evolution. Beyond its historical roots, Iloilo City's gastronomic offerings have become central to its tourism development strategies, attracting both local and international visitors seeking authentic culinary experiences. The Department of Tourism (2023) emphasizes that Iloilo's culinary heritage significantly contributes to its reputation as a premier food destination in the Philippines. Food is a key component of a tourist's experience, and food festivals often foster the development of gastronomic tourism, which is considered a form of special interest tourism. Tourists frequently seek not only the dishes themselves but also the origins, legends, and stories surrounding them. Gastronomy plays a major role in shaping how tourists experience a destination and influences their likelihood of returning to savor its unique cuisine (Seal, 2025). Asian nations actively promote their culinary heritage as a means of cultural recognition. At the regional level, culinary heritage is constructed to achieve multiple objectives, highlighting local specialties, generating economic opportunities, and sustaining historical and emotional connections between their places of origin (Assmann, 2024). In the Philippines, local dishes reflect history and identity. Iloilo, as the country's first Creative City of Gastronomy, showcases its use of indigenous local ingredients, supports sustainable practices, and promotes its unique culinary heritage.

## **5. Food Guide Studies and Their Effects on Tourism**

Food guides and promotional materials play a significant role in shaping tourist behavior and preferences. For example, Kılıç et al. (2021) demonstrated that brochure involvement influences perceptions of service quality, attitudes toward advertising, and attitudes toward the product itself. Recent research reinforces and expands on these findings. A study conducted in Laguna, Philippines, by Maraña et al. (2024) revealed that affordability, cleanliness, tailored menus, and consistent quality in food tourism strongly influence tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit. Similarly, research on street food experiences in Malacca, Malaysia, showed that food quality, service quality, and hygiene significantly affect domestic tourists' attitudes and revisit intentions (Tan et al., 2025). In Spain, Rodríguez-Antón et al. (2023), analyzing data from 2019 to 2022, highlighted that motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty in gastronomic events are closely tied to sustainable tourist behavior, which in turn strengthens the cultural identity of destinations. These findings suggest strong overlap with the role of brochures and guides, which aim to inform potential tourists, highlight authenticity and uniqueness, and influence behavior in terms of destination choice, revisit intention, and satisfaction.

## **6. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore Iloilo's culinary heritage, focusing on noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods, to develop a gastronomy guide to support cultural preservation, tourism promotion, and sustainable local development. Data were collected from January to December 2025 through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with local chefs, food entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists to understand their experiences and perceptions of Iloilo's food culture. Qualitative methods were appropriate as they allowed the study to uncover cultural meanings, traditions, and community values embedded in local cuisine (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus group discussions encouraged participants to share and reflect on Iloilo's iconic dishes, generating diverse perspectives in a short period. These discussions enabled researchers to uncover nuanced meanings attached to local food practices and are recognized as an effective method for gathering knowledge in a natural, dialogic setting (Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2017). The study highlighted local voices and authentic practices, presenting a culturally grounded and community-driven representation of Iloilo as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy (Tracy, 2020).

The study involved 25 participants from Iloilo City, including key stakeholders, local chefs, food entrepreneurs, residents, and tourists. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting those directly involved in Iloilo's gastronomy, and convenience sampling, including available residents and tourists to capture general experiences. This approach ensured both insider and outsider perspectives on Iloilo's culinary identity. Focus group interviews were the main data collection method. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which identifies and interprets recurring patterns in participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Word cloud analysis using WordArt was employed to visually highlight frequently occurring terms and support thematic analysis (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014; McNaught & Lam, 2010). Themes derived from the thematic and word cloud analyses were subsequently translated into visual categories, which served as the basis for the development of the illustrative food guide presented in the findings. This process ensured that the illustrative food guide was firmly grounded in participants' narratives and accurately reflected Iloilo's culinary heritage, particularly its iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods.

## **7. Findings**

This section presents the findings based on the objectives. It examined Iloilo's rich culinary heritage, highlighting its iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. The aim was to develop an illustrative food guide that preserved cultural traditions, promoted tourism, and supported sustainable local development.

The word cloud presentation was utilized to explore the rich culinary heritage of Iloilo, Philippines, with emphasis on noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. This visualization technique highlights the most frequently mentioned culinary items and cultural themes expressed by participants, thereby providing a clear representation of the community's shared gastronomic identity, presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: A Word Cloud of Iloilo’s Iconic Dishes and Delicacies**

The culinary heritage of Iloilo is reflected in iconic noodle and soup dishes, each with a rich history, deep cultural meaning, and a strong sense of local pride. La Paz Batchoy is celebrated as the city’s signature dish, while Pancit Molo, a flavorful dumpling soup, highlights the Chinese influence on Ilonggo cuisine. KBL (Kadyos, Baboy, Langka), or pigeon pea, pork, and jackfruit stew, is prepared by simmering pork with pigeon peas and unripe jackfruit, then soured with *Batuan* fruit for its distinct tangy flavor. And, *Binakol* showcases Ilonggo ingenuity and connection to nature. These dishes not only satisfy hunger but also embody Ilonggos’ cultural identity, simplicity, and creativity, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Noodle and Soup Dishes**

Dishes	Preparation	Participants Culinary Heritage Perspective
La Paz Batchoy	<p><b>Ingredients:</b> Fresh noodles, pork innards (liver, spleen, kidney), pork fat, shrimp stock, crushed pork cracklings, garlic, scallions, and seasonings.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Egg noodles are blanched, topped with pork offal, crushed pork cracklings, garlic, spring onions, and slices of pork. A rich, savory broth made from pork bones and shrimp stock is poured over.</p>	<p>“A well-known noodle soup of Iloilo that represents the city’s culinary heritage and reflects local pride.” – Food Entrepreneurs</p> <p>“A traditional dish that embodies the food identity and cultural pride of Iloilo.” – Resident</p>
Pancit Molo	<p><b>Ingredients:</b> Ground pork, chicken, shrimp, garlic, onions, wonton wrappers, chicken broth, and seasonings.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Dumplings filled with minced pork, chicken, and shrimp are wrapped in wonton wrappers, then simmered in a chicken broth with shredded chicken and garlic.</p>	<p>“An expression of Chinese culinary influence in Iloilo’s local food traditions.” – Local Chef</p> <p>“A soup commonly enjoyed during family occasions and community celebrations.” – Resident</p>
KBL (Kadyos, Baboy, Langka)	<p><b>Ingredients:</b> Pork, pigeon peas (kadyos), unripe jackfruit (langka), Garcinia binucao fruit (batuan), garlic, onions, and seasonings.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Pork is simmered with kadyos (pigeon peas) and unripe jackfruit. The broth is soured using <i>batuan</i> fruit, giving it a distinct tangy taste.</p>	<p>“It remains a staple food in rural areas, and common consumption in everyday households” – Stakeholder</p> <p>“A dish that reflects ingenuity in cooking and harmony of flavors.” – Food Entrepreneurs</p> <p>“A comforting food that evokes a sense of home and familiarity.” – Resident</p>
“Chicken Binakol”  Native Chicken with Coconut Water	<p><b>Ingredients:</b> Native chicken, young coconut water, coconut meat, papaya, lemongrass, ginger, onions, and seasonings.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> Native chicken is stewed in young coconut water with coconut meat, ginger, onions, and green papaya. Traditionally cooked in bamboo tubes over an open fire.</p>	<p>“A dish that highlights culinary creativity through the use of coconut water and traditional cooking in bamboo or clay vessels, reflecting harmony with nature.” – Stakeholder</p> <p>“A unique local food known for its rich and savory taste.” – Tourists</p>

The richness of Ilonggo culinary heritage is beautifully reflected in its rice-based delicacies, which highlight simplicity, creativity, and cultural meaning, as reflected in Table 2. *Baye-baye*, made from young rice pounded and mixed with grated coconut and sugar, is a chewy treat often enjoyed during snacks and town fairs. *Inday-inday* transforms sticky rice flour into festive food. *Bitso-bitso* is a twisted fried rice cake made from glutinous rice flour, deep-fried to golden perfection, and coated with caramelized sugar. *Suman*, perhaps the most iconic, is glutinous rice cooked in coconut milk, sweetened, and carefully wrapped in banana leaves before steaming. These delicacies embody stories of family, community, and identity where every grain of rice becomes a vessel of Ilonggo heritage and pride.

**Table 2: Rice-Based Delicacies**

Dishes	Preparation	Participants Culinary Heritage Perspective
<p><i>“Baye-baye”</i></p> <p>Pounded Young Rice</p>	<p><i>Ingredients:</i> Pinipig (young rice), grated coconut, sugar.</p> <p><i>Method:</i> Young rice (<i>pinipig</i>) is pounded and mixed with grated coconut, then sweetened to form a chewy treat.</p>	<p>“A heritage delicacy that reflects the simplicity of Ilonggo food traditions.” – Local Chef</p> <p>“Commonly consumed during in-between-meal times and local festivities.” – Food Entrepreneurs</p> <p>“A dish that emphasizes the use of locally sourced rice and coconut.” – Tourists</p>
<p><i>“Inday-Inday”</i></p> <p>Sticky Rice Flour</p>	<p><i>Ingredients:</i> Glutinous rice flour, muscovado sugar, grated coconut.</p> <p><i>Method:</i> Sticky rice flour is shaped, steamed, and topped with grated coconut and melted muscovado sugar.</p>	<p>“A delicacy that reflects culinary creativity by enhancing sticky rice with layered textures and flavors, making it suitable for celebrations.” – Residents</p> <p>“Typically prepared and shared during community gatherings and town fiestas.” – Stakeholder</p> <p>“A food that conveys the warmth and hospitality associated with Ilonggo culture.” – Tourists</p>
<p><i>“Bitso-bitso”</i></p> <p>Twisted Fried Rice Cake</p>	<p><i>Ingredients:</i> Glutinous rice flour, sugar, oil.</p> <p><i>Method:</i> Glutinous rice flour is shaped into twisted strands, deep-fried until golden, and coated in caramelized sugar.</p>	<p>“Highlights the traditional use of muscovado sugar and glutinous rice in local food preparation.” – Local Chef</p> <p>“Recognized as a common street snack among locals.” – Stakeholder</p> <p>“A sweet, crisp delicacy enjoyed for its texture and flavor.” – Tourists</p>
<p><i>“Suman”</i></p> <p>Glutinous Rice Cooked in Coconut Milk</p>	<p><i>Ingredients:</i> Glutinous rice, coconut milk, sugar, and banana leaves.</p> <p><i>Method:</i> Glutinous rice is cooked in coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves, and steamed.</p>	<p>“<i>Suman</i> is more than food, it is tradition wrapped in banana leaves, a taste of heritage.” – Stakeholder</p> <p>“Snack wrapped in banana leaves, it also represents Ilonggo resourcefulness.” – Resident</p>

Ilonggo baked goods highlight both tradition and creativity, offering flavors that have become part of daily life and pasalubong culture. Biscocho, made from toasted bread with butter and sugar, is a household staple often paired with coffee or hot chocolate. Meanwhile, Barquillos, delicate wafer rolls sometimes filled with caramelized milk, showcase craftsmanship and patience. Equally cherished is Galletas de Patatas, thin and crisp biscuits baked from flour, sugar, milk, and eggs. Simple yet comforting, they reflect everyday Ilonggo resourcefulness and remain a humble favorite for both locals and visitors. In contrast, Butterscotch represents a modern addition to Iloilo’s baked specialties. Bake goods embody Ilonggo warmth, creativity, and heritage. Is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Baked Goods**

Dishes	Preparation	Participants Culinary Heritage Perspective
Biscocho	<i>Ingredients:</i> Bread slices, butter, sugar.  <i>Method:</i> Bread is toasted until crisp, spread with butter, and sprinkled with sugar before a final bake.	“A common household snack typically enjoyed with coffee or hot chocolate.” – Resident “A well-known Iloilo food item valued as a customary souvenir.” – Tourists
Barquillos	<i>Ingredients:</i> Flour, sugar, milk, butter.  <i>Method:</i> Thin batter is cooked, rolled into delicate wafers, and sometimes stuffed with caramelized milk.	“Symbolizes culinary craftsmanship, patience, and artistry, commonly consumed during celebrations and given as food souvenirs.” – Stakeholder “A refined snack that reflects the technical skill and expertise of Ilonggo bakers.” – Food Entrepreneur
Galletas de Patatas	<i>Ingredients:</i> Flour, sugar, milk, eggs.  <i>Method:</i> A thin dough is shaped into round biscuits and baked until crisp and golden.	“A modest and comforting delicacy that reflects everyday Ilonggo ingenuity and preference for simple snacks.” – Stakeholder “A plain biscuit that embodies the flavors and traditions of Ilonggo culinary heritage.” – Tourists
Butterscotch	<i>Ingredients:</i> Brown sugar, butter, flour, eggs, vanilla, and cashew nuts (or other local nuts).  <i>Method:</i> Butter and brown sugar are melted together to create a caramel base, then mixed with flour, eggs, and vanilla to form a rich batter. Chopped cashew nuts are folded in before baking. The result is a chewy, golden-brown bar with a perfect balance of sweetness and nuttiness.	“The chewy sweetness of butterscotch reflects Ilonggo warmth and food-based hospitality.” – Resident “Butterscotch illustrates Ilonggo skill in combining traditional flavors with creative adaptation.” – Local Chef “A contemporary local delicacy that is proudly offered as pasalubong by residents.” – Food Entrepreneur “A recognized Iloilo specialty commonly chosen as a take-home food souvenir.” – Stakeholder

Iloilo City’s culinary heritage, as recognized through its UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy designation, reflects a rich tapestry of flavors, traditions, and cultural practices. The city’s noodle and soup dishes, such as *La Paz Batchoy*, *Pancit Molo*, *KBL (Kadyos, Baboy, Langka)*, and *Chicken Binakol*, exemplify communal dining, family gatherings, and the use of locally sourced, seasonal ingredients, highlighting both comfort and tradition. Rice-based delicacies, including *Baye-baye*, *Bitso-bitso*, *Inday-inday*, and *Suman*, showcase the city’s agricultural heritage, resourcefulness, and indigenous food practices, reflecting simplicity and sustainability in everyday cuisine. Meanwhile, baked goods such as *Biscocho*, *Barquillos*, *Galletas de Patatas*, and *Butterscotch* demonstrate a fusion of traditional craftsmanship with modern baking techniques, serving as both signature souvenirs and popular street foods that reinforce local identity. Together, these culinary categories illustrate that Iloilo’s iconic dishes are not only gastronomic creations but also cultural artifacts, embodying the city’s gastronomic identity, historical continuity, and role as a living repository of food heritage. Diagram 1 presents a tree diagram, created using the Venngage design platform, that provides a clear, illustrative food guide that builds on Iloilo City’s culinary heritage. The guide promotes cultural preservation, gastronomic tourism, and sustainable engagement with the city’s rich culinary traditions. This visual synthesis organizes qualitative findings into an interpretative framework, reflecting the generalized context of consumption derived from participant narratives and translating cultural insights into an accessible and engaging format.

Overall, this study identified the iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods that define Iloilo City’s culinary heritage, as expressed through participants’ narratives and cultural meanings. Building on these findings, the study developed an illustrative food guide that visually organizes and presents Iloilo City’s culinary traditions. The guide reflects Iloilo City’s gastronomic identity and supports cultural preservation, tourism promotion, and sustainable development.

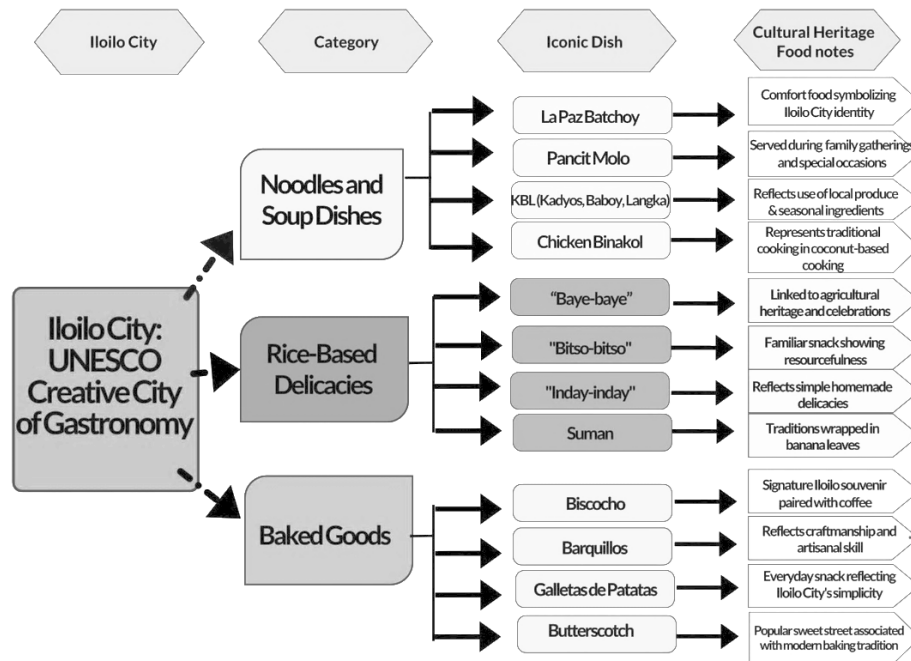


Figure 2: Cultural Heritage Food Guide to Iloilo City of Gastronomy

## 8. Discussion

The findings revealed the rich culinary heritage of Iloilo, Philippines, as reflected in its iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. Respondents expressed strong appreciation for these food traditions, recognizing them as important expressions of Ilonggo culture and identity. Noodle and soup dishes, particularly La Paz Batchoy, symbolized cultural exchange and local pride. Rice-based delicacies highlighted the creative use of staple ingredients such as glutinous rice and coconut, while baked goods like Biscocho illustrated the balance between tradition and modern culinary influences. The study affirmed that Iloilo's culinary practices serve as cultural symbols that embody history, ingenuity, and community values. The findings further emphasized that Iloilo's culinary heritage is not only central to its cultural identity but also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and sustainable local development, reinforcing the city's recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that Iloilo City of Gastronomy, Philippines, possesses a rich and dynamic culinary heritage, clearly reflected in its iconic noodle and soup dishes, rice-based delicacies, and baked goods. The findings demonstrated that these food traditions are highly valued by respondents for their cultural meanings, historical significance, and role in everyday life. Iloilo's culinary practices were affirmed as important cultural symbols that embody history, creativity, and shared community values. The illustrative food guide serves as a foundational framework from which more comprehensive and context-specific food guides may be developed, reinforcing the understanding of Iloilo's cuisine not only as a marker of cultural identity but also as a valuable asset for tourism development and sustainable local growth, thereby strengthening the city's status as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

To further strengthen and sustain Iloilo's culinary heritage, several strategies are recommended. First, cultural preservation efforts should prioritize the documentation of traditional recipes, cooking techniques, and food practices through collaboration among local government units, cultural agencies, and academic institutions. Second, tourism promotion may be enhanced by integrating iconic dishes into culinary tours, food festivals, and destination branding initiatives. Third, incorporating local cuisine into hospitality and tourism education can help transmit cultural knowledge and encourage sustainable food practices. Fourth, increased support for local food entrepreneurs through skills training, financial assistance, and improved market access can help sustain traditional dishes and small-scale enterprises. Finally, expanding cultural exchange through local and international partnerships, as well as digital platforms, can increase awareness of Ilonggo cuisine and further strengthen Iloilo's recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

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## AI Declaration

The use of AI tools, including ChatGPT, WordArt, Venngage, Grammarly, and QuillBot, was employed in the preparation of this manuscript. These tools facilitated drafting and refining responses to peer review comments, summarizing and organizing selected literature for the Review of Related Literature, improving the clarity and flow of arguments, paraphrasing sections for enhanced readability, and assisting in the creation of diagrams and figures.

## Ethics Declaration

Ethical considerations were observed in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly practiced to protect participants' identities and sensitive information. Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process, and the author declares no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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