

Gastronomic tourism on the rise. Profile of the gastronomic tourist in Cuenca (Ecuador)



JOURNAL

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ARTICLE INFO

Received 31st of May
2023

Accepted 18th of
December 2023

Keywords:

*Cuenca; Ecuador;
Gastronomy
Motivations;
Tourism.*

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research was to identify whether gastronomic tourism is developed in the city of Cuenca (Ecuador), next to other questions such as: what is the profile of the gastronomic tourist, tourist resources associated with local gastronomy, level of tourist satisfaction, and economic contribution of gastronomic tourism. A mixed research method supported by the SPSS statistical program was used to evaluate the reliability, level of correlation of variables and other statistical techniques to validate the results found. It should be noted that gastronomic tourism is indeed being developed, in spite of the existence of a limited offer of products of this type of tourism. However, the economic contribution is very significant. In addition, and as a fundamental contribution, the results presented will serve as a reference for the generation of projects and plans in the short or long term, which will allow the consolidation of Cuenca as a gastronomic tourist destination.

Gastronomic tourism will reach its climax when traditional cuisine is considered at the same level of importance as the endemic flora or fauna at the place being visited.
The author.

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, eating while doing different tourist activities has been a basic need of the tourist. However, this has been changing to such an extent that today a new tourism market with its own needs and motivations has been established, such as gastronomic tourism, where the main objective of the tourist is to carry out various activities related to the gastronomy of the destination visited. In addition, it allows the destination to advertise its intangible cultural heritage (ICH) linked to the traditional gastronomy that is part of its cultural identity, as stated by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH, without dismissing to mention that it allows improving the quality of life in rural areas (Troncos & Arzeno, 2019) and strengthening food sovereignty.

There are several localities that have relied to gastronomy in order to consolidate themselves as a gastronomic tourist destination. This is the case of Lyon-Country (Bataf, 2021; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010) currently considered the gastronomic capital of France, thanks to its appropriate articulation of culinary resources in the tourism phenomenon, starting with the recognition of its local food products, hundreds of them with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), added to the presence of restaurants of excellence that are part of the Michelin guide, which reinforce the above mentioned strategies.

Spain is another reference in the generation of gastronomic tourism products, especially those related to wine tourism (De Jesús Contreras & Medina, 2021; R. Hernández et al., 2018; López et al., 2013) and oleotourism (Aguilar & García, 2019; Cañero et al., 2015; Carrillo et al., 2019; Pulido et al., 2021; Vásquez et al., 2015). Where, the generation of tourist routes or circuits based on the product (grape-olive), allows the diversification of conventional tourism activities, the active participation of the various actors in the value chain and, most importantly, to move from the discourse to the practice of sustainable tourism.

But gastronomic tourism goes beyond the generation of gastronomic-tourist products with local identity. It also requires identifying the socio-demographic profile, tourist characteristics prior to and during their stay at the destination (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Sánchez & López, 2012) main needs and motivations that determine the place of visit and finally the level of tourist satisfaction (Hernández et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2012).

In Ecuador, despite the fact that tourism is the first source of economic income in the balance of services and the third source of non-fossil income, with a contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of 1.2% in the year 2021 (MINTUR, 2020, 2021), there are few projects or plans related to gastronomic tourism from the public or private sector. Torres (2022) states that in Ecuador, the lack of strategic planning by the Ministry of Tourism [MINTUR] is the main reason why no progress has been made in this type of tourism. To this we must add the limited research related to this tourism typology in early stages in cities such as Quito or Guayaquil (Aulestia, 2021; López et al., 2018; López, Uribe, et al., 2017) Riobamba (Villalva & Inga, 2021).

In the specific case of Cuenca, López et al., (2017) conducted a study of culinary motivations to North American tourists, obtaining as a result three tourist typologies: survivors, enjoyers and experiencers based on Björk (2016) for whom local cuisine is a key element when choosing the destination to visit. Ibidem. furthermore, they state that greater promotion of local gastronomy is required to make the city a competitive destination.

However, a study of the profile of the national gastronomic tourist who visits this city has not been carried out in order to learn about their needs and motivations. In this way, gastronomic tourism products can be generated according to the needs of a booming tourism that has contributed to the post-pandemic tourism reactivation of several tourist destinations that managed to be resilient thanks to domestic or proximity tourism (Mercado & Walter, 2020; Ntounis et al., 2022) which allows the enjoyment of activities and

experiences different from those carried out in the usual place of residence (Soria & Llurdés, 2013).

In this sense, the present research work aims to identify the profile of the gastronomic tourist visiting the city of Cuenca (Ecuador), considered a national and international tourist destination due to the architectural beauty of its historic center, which is part of the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1999. Also, its main natural attraction, El Cajas National Park, is part of the RAMSAR sites (wetlands of international importance) since 2022. Subsequently, it generates a grouping according to the tourism typologies established by Hjalager (2004). To identify the main motivations linked to gastronomic tourism and the level of tourist satisfaction. In the same way, to be a theoretical contribution that supports the conceptualization of gastronomic tourism as a tourist typology independent of others. Finally, to be a qualitative and quantitative reference for the implementation of projects or plans to public and private institutions in charge of local tourism administration.

After this introduction, the report is composed of a second section where a review of the scientific literature is made; a third one corresponding to the description of the methodology used and its treatment by means of the statistical software SPSS version 25; a fourth one where the results obtained and the respective discussions become well known; following a fifth section dedicated to the conclusions of the work. It ends with the references which have been used.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Gastronomic tourism

When traveling to a protected natural area, the main motivation is to enjoy nature and learn about the flora and/or fauna endemic to the area. This has allowed the establishment of new market segments such as bird watching, whale watching, and safari tours, among others. In the same sense, when we travel to a destination different from our place of residence, we should do so, thinking that there are culinary manifestations as well different from the usual ones, which are part of the local identity and, just like a site museum, a handicraft square, a monument, a church from the pre-Hispanic or colonial era, those are part of the cultural heritage of the tourist destination visited.

There is currently confusion between culinary tourism and gastronomic tourism. For this reason, and in order to clarify these doubts, the (World Food Travel Association, 2022) stated that the term "culinary" was used more than a decade ago among native speakers of English to refer to trips that had the purpose of tasting the cuisine at certain destination (including drinks) with an elitist perception, which has been maintained. On the other hand, the use of the term "gastronomic" tourism is more commonly used by speakers of Romance languages, especially in Europe, for whom "traveling to eat" sounds very basic and banal. Therefore, the use of the word gastronomy has more breadth and meaning since it encompasses everything that has to do with the gastronomic culture of an area, understanding as part of this, the recipes, customs, traditions, utensils and more.

Another definition and with a wider academic scope, is the one established by World Tourism Organization UNWTO and Basque Culinary Center (2019) which state:

Gastronomic tourism, is a type of tourism activity that is characterized by the traveler experiencing during his trip activities and products related to the gastronomy of the place. In addition to authentic, traditional and/or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomic tourism can also include other types of activities, such as visiting local producers, participating in gastronomic festivals or attending cooking classes. Enotourism (wine tourism) is a subtype of gastronomic tourism and refers to tourism whose purpose is to visit vineyards, wineries, taste, consume and/or purchase wine, either directly or near the place where it is produced (p.8).

In conclusion, gastronomic tourism goes beyond the enjoyment of traditional or contemporary cuisine, or a local beverage. This growing market segment seeks to experience and learn everything related to the culinary culture of the area visited, from agricultural processes, to the artisanal or industrial transformation of food, and finally to its tasting. It also allows the generation of secondary economic income for farmers or residents of rural areas.

2.2. Gastronomic tourist profile

The various research studies carried out have contributed to establishing different patterns of behavior in the gastronomic tourism segment, with the aim of identifying their needs and efficiently meeting their expectations. However, as Ignatov & Smith (2006) argue, much of the research on the profile of the gastronomic tourist has focused on wine tourism, so for this research work we have used the phenomenological model proposed by Hjalager (2004), which is based on experiences associated with gastronomic tourism that is divided into four categorizations. Recreational (1): They do not frequent restaurants, on the contrary they prefer to stay in apartments where they can prepare their own food or, failing that, they look for restaurants with traditional cuisine from their country of origin. Gastronomy is not a determining factor when selecting a tourist destination. Existential (2): They seek to escape from the daily routine, and for them the most important thing is the company than the gastronomic establishment. That is why they frequent franchised or family restaurants. Distraction (3): Their main objective is to learn about the local culture, therefore eating alone is not their fundamental need. This type of tourist frequents traditional restaurants, where locals eat, thus avoiding going too expensive or extravagant places. In addition, they seek active participation in agricultural farms, wineries, cooking classes, among others. Experiential gastronomic tourism (4): Like existential gastronomic tourists, these are educated, informed, but they prefer restaurants that are in culinary fashion, because in this segment, food symbolizes their lifestyle.

2.3. Tourism motivations

Beltrán & Parra (2017) state that, in tourism terminology, motivations can be considered as those causes that push tourists/excursionists to perform certain actions or to initiate a trip, and as they are human beings they enclose a subjective character that is difficult to measure. In the same context Pons et al. (2007) state "This analysis of motivations allows a better

understanding of the real expectations, needs and objectives/goals of tourists. [...] it is essential for the creation of tailor-made "holiday products" designed to meet tourists' needs and expectations" (p .94). But what are these motivations that a tourist has? Crompton (1979) is considered to be the precursor of the analysis of tourist motivations, as evidenced by the countless citations within the researches that seek to know the profile of the tourist of a certain destination.

Crompton's scientific production establishes two types of motivations: I) socio-psychological and II) cultural. The former are also known as push factors and are associated with the need to get away from stress, daily routine, peace of mind, etc. The second or pull factors are related to the destination and are as diverse as the existing tourist destinations and their demographic, social, environmental, political, cultural, etc. characteristics. In this way, it can be said that push factors are those that induce the person to make the decision to travel, while pull factors are those that help him/her choose where to travel.

2.4. Description of the study area

The county of Cuenca is the capital of the province of Azuay and its cantonal capital bears the same name. It is the third most populated city in Ecuador. According to the population growth recorded in the last 10 years of 15%, by 2020 it would have exceeded 635,000 inhabitants (INEC, 2022). It is important to mention that, in Ecuador the population census is conducted every ten years, for that reason the data are approximate.

Cuenca is also known as the Athens of Ecuador. It is located at 2,538 m.a.s.l. in the vicinity of the inter-Andean region and has temperatures ranging between 14°C and 18°C. As a result of its geographical location, in its markets you can find a great variety of agricultural products, among them: tubers, cereals, fruits and vegetables, which are the main ingredients of its traditional cuisine.

2.4.1. Tourism industry in the city of Cuenca

As the capital of the province and the largest in geographic extension, it contributes 66% of the Gross Value Added (GVA). On the other hand, 64.1% of its population is within the Economically Active Population range (EAP). Tourism establishments exceed 1.500 productive units, generating thousands of direct and indirect jobs (GADMC, 2019).

The contribution of food and beverage establishments is very large. In comparison at the national level, it represents 7.6% (1.041) of a total of 13.584 (MINTUR, 2023a) Without considering that hundreds of establishments dedicated to providing gastronomic services do not have the respective Single Annual Operating License [LUAF] granted by the MINTUR, this does not allow to have real data and, others as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic closed in a percentage of approximately 50% (Benalcázar, 2022). However, in recent months there has been a positive recovery in this sector, with the opening of new businesses offering national, international and contemporary cuisine. Specifically, the restaurant sector is made up of 668 establishments distributed in the existing categories (Fundación Municipal de Turismo para Cuenca FMTPC, 2022a).

2.4.2. Tourism statistics

Cuenca is considered a resilient tourist destination, due to the fact that in recent post-pandemic months it has worked on the recovery of tourist flow, obtaining positive results during the last national holidays of 2022 (see table 1). Thus, the minimum number of visitors during a holiday is 36.614, a maximum of 96.622 achieving an average tourist visits of 49.900 respectively (FMTPC, 2022b).

The present research was conducted during the four holidays of: Easter week, Labor Day, battle of Pichincha and Independence Day.

Holidays 2022	% of occupancy	Average daily rate (dollars)	Tourism Revenues (millions of dollars)	Number of visitors	Number of days
Carnival Party	71	\$80,00	\$13.56	56.480	3
Easter Week	75	\$70,00	\$7.19	51.358	2
Labor Day	54	\$98,00	\$3.59	36.614	2
Battle of Pichincha	79	\$98,00	\$5.27	53.819	2
Independence Day	93	\$98,00	\$12.4	63.503	2
Independence of Guayaquil	86	\$77,00	\$9.12	58.851	2
Independence of Cuenca	93	\$130,00	\$37.68	96.622	4
Christmas	42	\$79,00	\$2.27	28.674	3

Table 1. Tourism indicators for the city of Cuenca in the year 2022. Source: Municipal Tourism Foundation for Cuenca. Own elaboration (2023).

As mentioned in tourism literature, for a traveler to be considered a tourist, he or she must spend the night in the city to visit. Under this concept, the city of Cuenca shows a high occupancy rate of lodging services, with a minimum of 54%, a maximum of 93% and an average occupancy of 71%. The city currently has 12,289 places to stay. (FMTPC, 2022b)

One of the weaknesses that is evident as a result of the literature review are the few tourist attractions that are properly ranked and are part of the inventory of tourist resources. Specifically, there are only four (4); three cultural manifestations and one natural attraction (MINTUR, 2023b). It is evident that there is no gastronomic tourist attraction according to the typologies established by Ignatov and Smith (2006) and Montecinos (2022) but this does not mean that the city lacks this type of resources, but rather that an update of the tourist attractions is required, emphasizing those that allow the consolidation of gastronomic-tourist products.

3. METHODOLOGY

The phases of this process began with a review of the existing literature, starting with the conceptualization of the terms gastronomic tourism, profile and tourist motivations. This was followed by a description of the study area. This first phase is of utmost importance, regardless of the research topic or the methodology used in its development (Fuentes et al., 2020).

Subsequently, the field work was developed, which was elaborated with a questionnaire, containing 23 final items, this after the elimination of those questions that were not very clear to the respondents during the pretest. The collection of information was carried out inside the gastronomic establishments (restaurants) by the author and service personnel (waiters), as well as by the clients themselves who answered the survey using the QR code. The restaurants registered in the Ministry of Tourism's registry were selected, with a total of 643 (MINTUR, 2023). From this number, and under a convenient selection with the support of the Restaurant Association of Cuenca, those that are frequented by tourists were chosen, achieving a participation of 21 gastronomic establishments.

A total of 424 valid surveys were obtained during the research time resulting from a non-probabilistic sampling, frequently used for this type of research (López, Uribe, et al., 2017; López-Guzmán et al., 2019, 2021; Sánchez & López, 2012). The construction of the items was also based on the questionnaires elaborated by the aforementioned authors. No stratification by age, gender, education level or other variable was performed, considering that there are no previous studies to support this process.

3.1. Population and sample

To obtain the sample, the number of tourists on the holiday prior to the research was considered, which was 56,480 visitors (FMTPC, 2022b). We proceeded to apply the correspondent formula with a confidence level of 95% (Aguilar, 2005) obtaining as an outcome, a sample size of 382 people. Satisfactorily, in the end, 424 surveys were reached, after eliminating those that corresponded to residents who consumed at the participating establishments. The exclusion was done by means of a query item on the place of residence. This reduced the maximum error to 4.74% (See table 2).

Numbers of tourists on the holiday prior	56.480
Geographical area	Tourist restaurants in Cuenca
Sample size	424
*Temporality (holidays 2022)	Easter Week (April) Labor Day (April) Battle of Pichincha (May) Independence Day (August)
Procedure	Structured questionnaire survey
Confidence level	95% % (p=q=0,5)

Table 2. Technical data sheet of the research. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

The data obtained was processed using the SPSS version 25 computer system. The statistical techniques used were: frequency analysis, correlations, contingency tables and satisfaction level scales.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before clarifying the hypotheses put forward in this article, it is appropriate to describe the demographic profile of the sample. The following tables and graphs are the result of SPSS statistical techniques. They begin by identifying gender, marital status, age, occupation, income level and social stratum. Table 3 shows each detail in absolute and relative frequencies.

Variable	Item	Count	%	Variable	Item	Count	%
Genre N=424	Women	192	45,28	Occupation N=424	Private worker	184	43,4
	Men	232	54,72		Public worker	136	32,08
Marital Status N=424	Single	179	42,22		Entrepreneur (Self-employed)	80	18,87
	Married	221	52,12		Entrepreneur	24	5,66
	Domestic partnership	16	3,77	Income level N=424	Less than \$1.000	130	30,66
	Divorced	0	0		\$1.000 a \$2.000	165	38,92
	Widow	8	1,89		\$2.000 a \$3.000	97	22,88
Under 20 years old	0	0	Superior a \$3.000		32	7,55	
Age N=424	20 to 29 years	128	30,19	Social stratum N=424	High	24	5,66
	30 to 39 years	176	41,51		Low	134	31,6
	40 to 49 years	48	11,32		Middle	266	62,74
	50 to 59 years	67	15,8				
	More than 60 years	5	1,18				

Table 3. Sociodemographic profile of domestic tourists. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

With respect to the sociodemographic profile, it was found that there is no significant variation between women and men, since men represent more than half of the tourists (54.72%) and women complete the total number of respondents with 45.28% respectively.

Their marital status was mostly married (52.12%), followed by single persons (42.22%), and a small sample reported being widow (1.89). In terms of age, almost a third are between 20 and 39 years of age, followed by people between 50 and 59 years of age. Of the research sample and in relation to their occupation, less than 7% are entrepreneurs, being mostly workers in the private sector (43.40%), followed by those working in the public sector (32.08%) and the difference declared to be Entrepreneur (18.87%). Their average income is between \$1,000 and \$2,000 UDS (38.92%) followed by those who earn less than \$1,000 USD, or 2.4 Ecuadorian Basic Wages. Finally, and in relation to the aforementioned variable, more than half (62.74%) consider themselves to be located in the middle-class social stratum.

4.1. Visiting characteristics

It is of great importance to identify the characteristics of tourism since this will allow the generation of segmented tourism products. More than half of the sample uses a private vehicle to travel from their place of residence to the tourist destination (53.77%), others use public transportation services (28.54%), and finally, few people indicated having used air transportation (17.69%), considering that the city of Cuenca has an airport with domestic connections between the cities of Quito and Guayaquil, respectively.

The minimum stay is 2 nights (39.39%), followed by one night (20.52%), and even stays longer than 4 days are recorded (8.02%), although this represents the lowest percentage. Regarding the place of accommodation, more than half made use of hotel facilities (54.01%), followed by overnight stays at the home of friends or relatives (22.64%), and platforms such as Booking digital sites (15.80%). When asked whether they travel alone or accompanied, 9 out of 10 respondents do so accompanied, one third do so with at least two people (34.20%), three companions (20.28%) and a very small number do so with 8 or more people, which could be considered organized tourist groups. As companions, three quarters indicate that they do so without children (77.36%), and finally the relationship with the companions is family (43.40%), and friends (35.85%).

The aforementioned characteristics can be used as a reference so that tour operators can design adaptable tourism products (routes or circuits) and so that food and beverage establishments have facilities (tables) for single or accompanied persons. Inspect table 4 shows each variable and its respective absolute and relative count over the sample size of the research.

Variable	Item	Count	%	Variable	Item	Count	%
Used transportation N=424	Private ground transportation	228	53.77	Number of people accompanying you N=424	1	72	16,98
	Public ground transportation	121	28.54		2	145	34,2
	Air transportation	75	17.69		3	86	20,28

Days of stay N=424	1	87	20,52		4	78	18,4
	2	167	39,39		5	32	7,55
	3	71	16,75		6	7	1,65
	4	65	15,33		8	3	0,71
	More than 4	34	8,02		9	1	0,24
Accommodation type N=424	Hotel Hostel Other accommodation types such as glampings	229	54.01	Children N=424	More than 9	5	0
	A relative or a friend's house	96	22.64		No	328	77.36
	Booking digital sites	67	15.80		Yes	96	22.64
	None	32	7.55		Relationship N=424	Couple	88
Visit the city N=424	By my own	40	9.43	Family		184	43.40
	Accompanied	384	90.57	Friends		152	35.85
	Total	424	100.00	Total		424	100.00

Table 4. Visiting characteristics. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

It is important to know the origin of visitors to develop marketing strategies and create new tourism products.

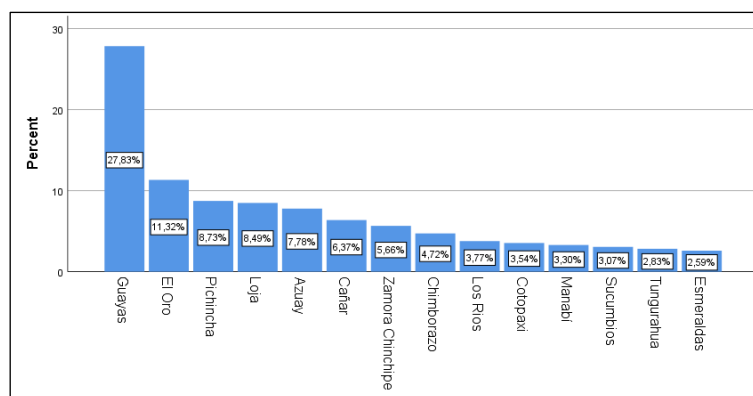


Figure 1. Permanent residence of visitors. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

Based on the above, about a quarter of tourists come from the Province of Guayas (27.83%), followed by residents of the Provinces of El Oro (11.32%), Pichincha (8.73%), Loja (8.49%),

neighboring cantons belonging to the Province of Azuay (7.78%), Cañar (6.37%) and more provinces with 5% or less of tourist contribution respectively (see figure 1).

4.2. Motivations

There are several reasons why travelers move from one place to another; which may be related to visits to family, friends or rest. In the present investigation, we asked what their motivation was. Thus, travel for leisure, vacations and recreation are the most mentioned by almost 8 out of 10 respondents, followed by other motivations (13.2%), visiting friends (7.5%) and finally business with almost 1%. The motivation for health was not mentioned by the sample considering that, in Cuenca, the parish of Baños is located where thermal services are offered and has an adequate hotel plant (Look table 5).

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	accumulated percentage
Reason to visit	Visit friend	32	7,5	7,5	7,5
	Business	4	0,9	0,9	8,5
	Leisure, vacation, recreation	332	78,3	78,3	86,8
	Other reasons	56	13,2	13,2	100,0
	Total	424	100,0	100,0	

Table 5. Reason for visiting city of Cuenca. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

4.2.1 Psychological (push) and cultural (pull) motivations

It was stated in the theoretical section that Crompton (1979) establishes different types of tourist motivations, also called push and pull factors. For this reason, the instrument used inquired about these motivations, obtaining as descriptive results that, of the internal factors (push), escape from daily environment is a priority (66%), followed by motivation related to prestige (13.2%) On the other hand, the pull factors, such as the search for different places or environments is consolidated as the favorite of the informants (61.3%), followed by learning about the local culture (29.2%) and other motivations (9.4%). Examine table 6.

		Count	N %
Psychological motivation (push factors)	Escape from routine (monotony)	280	66,0
	Relaxation (peace of mind)	16	3,8
	Personal relationship improvement	48	11,3
	To meet new people (social interaction)	24	5,7
	Prestige (High clase places)	56	13,2
Cultural motivation (pull factors)	New places pursuit	260	61
	Learning about local cultures	124	29,2
	Others	40	9,4

Table 6. Psychological and cultural motivations. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

Finally, we analyze whether there is a relationship between gender, psychological and cultural factors, respectively. The chi-square test was performed, where the bilateral asymptotic significance was $0.000 < 0.05$ and a Cramer's Vr = 360, showing a very strong relationship between gender and psychological motivations. Women report traveling to

escape routine (37.74%) 9 percentage points more than men, followed by interpersonal relationships (3.77%) where men report doing so to a greater extent (7.55%), travel for reasons of prestige represent only 13.2% for those surveyed, where men travel to a greater extent motivated by this factor (11.32%).

In the gender/cultural motivations relationship, a bilateral asymptotic significance of 0.000 <0.05 and a Cramer's V r statistic = 242 were obtained, showing a strong relationship. Traveling to see new places is the main motivation for both men and women, reaching 61.3%. However, men report a greater attraction for this motivation (37.74%) compared to women (23.58%). The motivation to know the local culture is established as the second motivation of the respondents, where men and women maintain similar percentages, together representing 29.2%. Eventually, other cultural motivations reach 9.4% of the surveys, here women have greater interest compared to men with a 5.6 percentage point difference.

4.3. Gastronomic tourism motivation

The objective of the research will be to determine if gastronomic tourism is developed in the city. For this reason, a closed question was posed in which the respondent stated whether his or her trip was directly related to the gastronomy of the destination to be visited, obtaining as a result that 15 out of every 100 people travel to taste and learn about local gastronomy. This result shows that there is an important market segment in this type of tourism (15,1%) with rates similar to other more consolidated gastronomic destinations investigated by Kivela and Crotts (2005) and Sánchez and López (2012). See table 7.

			Genre		Total
			Man	Woman	
Is your visit aimed to taste the city's traditional gastronomy?	No	Count	192	168	360
		% within the question	53,3%	46,7%	100,0%
		% within Genre	82,8%	87,5%	84,9%
	Yes	Count	40	24	64
		% within the question	62,5%	37,5%	100,0%
		% within Genre	17,2%	12,5%	15,1%
Total	Count	232	192	424	
	% within	54,7%	45,3%	100,0%	
	% within Genre	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Table 7. Local gastronomy as a motivation to visit. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

The chi-square test was performed to determine if there is a correlation between the gender/gastronomic motivation variables; where a bilateral significance of 0.175 >0.05 was obtained, so the two variables are independent. Another question raised in the research is the level of importance of gastronomy when planning a trip. A Linkert scale from 1 to 5 was

used, obtaining that more than two-thirds consider the destination's gastronomy to be very important (see table 8). In addition, a chi-square statistical test was carried out to determine whether or not there is a correlation between gender and the importance of the destination's gastronomy, where a bilateral significance of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a Cramer's V value $r=$ were obtained. 243, establishing a strong relationship. For women, the gastronomy of the destination is very important, marking a difference of 17.1% compared to the perception of men. No negative responses were obtained, and neutral opinions were evident in only 10.6% of those surveyed.

			Genre		Total
			Man	Woman	
How important is the gastronomy of the tourist destination when planning your trip?	Neutral	Count	23	22	45
		% within in the question	51,1%	48,9%	100,0%
		% within Genre	9,9%	11,5%	10,6%
	Important	Count	65	18	83
		% within in the question	78,3%	21,7%	100,0%
		% within Genre	28,0%	9,4%	19,6%
	Quite important	Count	144	152	296
		% within in the question	48,6%	51,4%	100,0%
		% within Genre	62,1%	79,2%	69,8%
Total	Count	232	192	424	
	% within	54,7%	45,3%	100,0%	
	% within Genre	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Table 8. Important is the gastronomy of the tourist destination when planning your trip. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

We have shown the importance of gastronomy when planning a trip, and since it is also conditioned by gender, it is also appropriate to review whether this gastronomic motivation is representative of the characteristics of our study population.

4.4. Gastronomic tourist profile

Once the first research objective was met, the profile of the gastronomic tourist was analyzed, checking if there is a correlation between the variable motivation for gastronomic tourism and other variables such as age, sex, marital status, among others. For this, contingency tables were made with the respective chi-square and Cramer's V statistical tests, finding a relationship between the aforementioned variable, level of education and occupation as described below. With a bilateral significance of $0.000 < 0.5$ and Cramer's V statistic $r=0.192$, it is evident that there is a strong relationship between motivation for gastronomic trips and academic level. Thus, national travelers who seek to taste traditional Cuenca cuisine have a level of postgraduate studies (50%), followed by professionals with a university degree (37.5%) and finally those who have completed high school (12.5%).

In relation to the occupation of the travelers, a bilateral significance of $0.000 < 0.5$ and the Cramer's V statistic $r = 0.234$ were obtained, consolidating a strong relationship between the two variables. Thus, the main occupation of the respondents was private employees (57%), followed by entrepreneurs (24.5%), public employees (12.3%) and businessmen (6.2%). The variables gender, age, marital status, social stratum and level of economic income obtained a bilateral significance greater than >0.5 , so there would be no relationship in our study population.

If people travel to taste local cuisine, it is important to know which establishments they prefer based on gender. In this sense, a correlation of the two variables was carried out where: $p=0.001 < 0.5$ and the Cramer's V statistical value $r=0.116$ showed a moderate relationship (see figure 2).

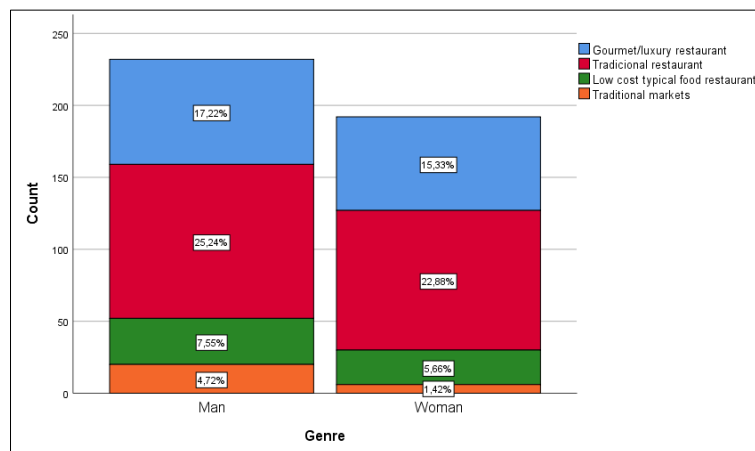


Figure 2. The best place to taste traditional gastronomy according to genre. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

Approximately a quarter of women and men prefer traditional restaurants to taste traditional cuisine, the second most preferred place is gourmet/luxury restaurants. These results allow us to identify two typologies of gastronomic tourists present in the literature: existential and experimental. Tasting gastronomy in low-cost restaurants is the alternative for 13.21% of the respondents and visiting markets was also mentioned by the informants, however, it is less than 5% in each gender.

4.5. Tourist satisfaction

The consolidation of a destination is not only related to the diversity of services or products of a tourist nature, but the quality and tourist experience are a key factor for travelers to return or recommend a visit. For this reason, this research was completed by analyzing the level of satisfaction through 3 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a statistical reliability level of 0.856 Cronbach's Alpha. (1) Satisfaction with the services received in the restaurant, (2) the quality-price ratio and (3) the level of tourist experience in the city, reached an average higher than 4.2 out of 5 points. These three indicators were used to create a three-level scale (see Figure 3).

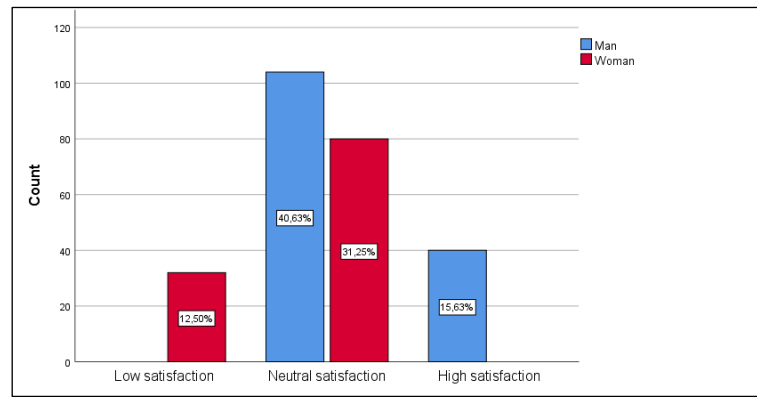


Figure 3. Tourist satisfaction levels. Source: Own elaboration (2023).

The variables gender/ Level of tourist satisfaction were analyzed by means of the chi-square statistical test, where a significance of $0.001 < 0.05$ and the Cramer's V $r=0.531$ statistical value were obtained, showing a very strong relationship. The men rated as neutral satisfaction with 9.38 percentage points ahead of the women, the women rated as low satisfaction with 12.5%, and on the other hand, the men were the only ones who rated as very satisfied with 15.63%.

It was also determined that there is a correlation between the level of studies and the satisfaction scale, where a significance of $0.001 < 0.5$ was obtained and the Cramer's V $r=0.335$ statistic value, which shows a very strong relationship. High satisfaction reached 15.63%, low satisfaction 12.50% and neutral satisfaction 71.88%.

Would I visit the city of Cuenca again (yes/no), was the last question of our questionnaire. A 79% of respondents said they would return and 21% would not. This variable together with the satisfaction scale obtained a bilateral significance of $0.035 < 0.5$ and Cramer's V statistic $r=0.162$, consolidating a strong relationship.

4.6. Contribution of food expenditures to Cuenca's economy during the holidays

Finally, our research determined that, during the 4 holidays of 2022 analyzed in this research, the city of Cuenca received of 51.324 visitors, with a hotel occupancy rate of 75,25% and, as a result, an average daily expenditure of \$91,00 (FMTPC, 2022b). Furthermore, if we consider that a third of the total gastro travel is spent on food (Hernández et al., 2015), the direct contribution from food spending during the analyzed holidays would be \$9.4 US dollars millions (analyzer table 1).

Cuenca received \$53.40 million dollars in total tourism income by the end of this research (FMTPC, 2022b). If we consider that 15.1% of the visitors surveyed stated that they came to the city motivated by gastronomy, it could be said that this type of tourism contributed \$8.06 million dollars.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tourist destinations have a potential resource that is incomparable with others, and that is their traditional cuisine. A key element of the culture that in recent years has allowed the emergence of a new type of tourism, such as gastronomic tourism. A modality where the visitor can taste the local history in edible portions that delight the senses, support the valorization of agricultural products, contribute to keep alive the traditions and symbolic-cultural values that enclose the traditional cuisine.

The present research determined that, in the city of Cuenca, gastronomic tourism is developed with rates similar to other tourist destinations. It also identified two profiles of gastronomic visitors: the experiential, who are those who seek to enjoy gastronomy in traditional restaurants, and the experimental, who prefer gourmet/luxury restaurants where the cuisine has traditional roots, but with more contemporary or avant-garde presentations. These travelers have similar characteristics both in their educational and occupational levels. This distinction is valid in order to identify a growing market segment and, based on this, generate sustainable tourism strategies.

It is also important to understand that the consolidation of a tourism destination depends on the degree of satisfaction perceived by visitors. By virtue of the above, the present research showed a high degree of neutral satisfaction, both in the food establishments and in the destination itself. These results will allow the public institutions in charge of tourism management in the city to establish new lines of action to improve this indicator. On the other hand, and no less important, the portfolio of gastronomic-tourist products is still very limited to the offer of restaurants, leaving aside other activities that are not exclusively gastronomic preparations, such as visits to food processing facilities, farms, gastronomic festivals, experiential classes, among others, which are typical of gastronomic tourism as stated by several authors reviewed in this paper.

Finally, and in response to the fourth question posed at the beginning of the research on the economic contribution of gastronomic tourism to the total tourist count, it should be stated that the income from this market segment is very significant and the entire value chain should continue to work together to ensure that these benefits are available to all stakeholders.

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