

# Culinary Identity and Intercultural Exchange in Hoi An and Da Nang

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**A**bstract– The Vietnamese food culture is a rich intercultural crossbreed of tradition, identity, and exchange. In this context, two of the culinary centers of Central Vietnam, Hoi An and Da Nang, are areas of the country that represent specific cultural, historical, and social characteristics, while also adapting to the modern demands of globalization and tourism. This research focuses on the food culture of Hoi An and Da Nang, examining culinary identity through specialty dishes, eating venues, and cultural values, as well as the influence of intercultural exchange on the cuisines of these cities. The qualitative approach involves reviewing the literature, analyzing secondary data, and conducting a case study, which allows for exploring the issue of how local gastronomy is also a cultural heritage and a sustainable tourism development tool. These results indicate the opposite but complementary nature of the tradition-oriented cuisine of Hoi An and the dynamic and modern cuisine of Da Nang. Meanwhile, the research also addresses the issue of commercialization, preserving culture, and environmental sustainability, and presents the solution on how culinary culture can be developed as a sustainable resource in the contemporary setting. The study adds to the wider scope of investigation of Vietnamese culinary culture and contributes to the insights into the way food may be used to facilitate cultural identity, tourism development, and international exchange.

**Keywords:** Culinary Culture; Da Nang; Destination Image; Hoi An; Tourism Branding.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism in Vietnam has demonstrated significant potential for economic growth and cultural branding. According to the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (2023), local gastronomy is a key driver of tourist satisfaction and enhances Vietnam's global tourism profile. Within this context, Hoi An and Da Nang serve as representative destinations in Central Vietnam, offering unique yet complementary culinary experiences (Tran & Nguyen, 2018).

Hoi An, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1999, serves as a historical reflection of the cultural exchange between Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Western merchants (UNESCO, 2023). This blended heritage is manifest in its iconic cuisine, featuring dishes such as cao lau, mi Quang, and "white rose" dumplings (Avieli, 2013). In contrast, Da Nang offers a contemporary coastal environment characterized by a thriving seafood culture and a rapidly expanding hospitality sector, cementing its status as a premier culinary destination (Danang Fantasticity, 2025).

The gastronomic culture of these two destinations has become central to their tourism identity (Quan & Wang, 2004). Guided food tours, culinary festivals, and street markets have emerged as vital instruments for promoting local culture to both domestic and international travelers (VN News, 2023). However, despite this increased awareness, empirical evidence regarding the direct impact of culinary culture on tourist motivation, satisfaction, and destination branding in Hoi An and Da Nang remains limited (Tran & Nguyen, 2018).

Further research into this relationship is essential to foster sustainable tourism growth and preserve the cultural heritage of Vietnam and other Southeast Asian destinations (Rostow, 1996).

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of culinary tourism, as discussed by Cohen and Avieli (2004), provides the theoretical foundation for this study, illustrating how local cuisine functions simultaneously as a pull factor and a potential barrier to the tourist experience (Ellis et al., 2018). This framework emphasizes the pivotal role of local gastronomy in shaping destination image, driving tourist motivation, and facilitating cultural interaction (Park & Widyanta, 2022). Consequently, this lens has been widely applied in tourism scholarship to examine the intricate relationships between culinary practices, perceived authenticity, and overall visitor satisfaction (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Avieli, 2013). Despite the region's cultural diversity and significant tourist appeal, the literature on Central Vietnam—specifically Hoi An and Da Nang—remains relatively under-researched. Current scholars continue to focus disproportionately on the primary hubs of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Tran, 2000; Avieli, 2013).

Despite their geographical proximity, Hoi An and Da Nang represent distinct yet interdependent gastronomic spheres; while the former is deeply rooted in tradition and heritage, the latter embodies modernity and innovation (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). However, the intersections, boundaries, and mutual influences between these two culinary cultures remain largely unexplored. Existing literature tends to treat them as isolated phenomena—either as a site of preserved heritage (Hoi An) or as a model of urban gastronomic development (Da Nang)—failing to account for the simultaneous impact of intercultural exchange, tourism dynamics, and modernization (Tuong, 2012).

Furthermore, although culinary tourism is a primary driver of regional economic growth, there is a dearth of empirical research examining the negotiation between authenticity and commercialization. Specifically, how local culinary practices adapt to shifts in regional identity and tourist perception remains under-examined (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Ellis et al., 2018). The absence of a comparative, context-sensitive analysis of Hoi An and Da Nang leaves a significant gap in our understanding of how local food cultures evolve under the pressures of globalization and cross-cultural interaction (Hansen et al., 2024).

### 2.1 Vietnamese culinary culture

Vietnamese cuisine is commonly known as one of the most diversified and culturally enriched cuisines in the world (Avieli, 2011). The culture of Vietnamese cuisine is based on the philosophy of balance: yin and yang, freshness and complexity, not only the consumption of food, but identity, history, and community. Northern parts and their mild tastes, central provinces and their elegance and intensity, and southern areas and their abundance and sweetness, the Vietnamese gastronomy is characterized by geographic variety and cultural pluralism (Khuong & Van Nga, 2018). Central Vietnam, with its time-honored status as an intersection of cultures, has a central place in the national mosaic of Vietnam as far as the general culinary tradition is concerned (VinWonders, 2024).

### 2.2 In the cultural and tourism map of Central Vietnam

Although food is commonly accepted as one of the most important elements of destination branding and tourist experience (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Ellis et al., 2018), little empirical investigation is done to explain how the culinary culture mediates the dichotomy between authenticity and commercialization in Central Vietnam. Hoi An and Da Nang are situated in the Quang Nam province and are neighboring the East Sea, and they present a perfect blend of modernity and traditional aspects (Huynh et al., 2020). Hoi An, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is an ancient trading post, where Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Western cultures used to meet, leaving impressive traces in the local cuisines (Bui et al., 2020). On the contrary, Da Nang has developed into a contemporary sea city and a major tourist attraction location with millions of national and international tourists visiting it annually (Holladay et al., 2020). The two places have utilized their culinary culture as an asset of cultural representation, economic growth, and tourism branding.

### 2.3 In both domestic and international contexts

The foodie attraction of Hoi An and Da Nang is not just in their popular foods but also in how these foods are used to show the culture and shared values of the people. The example of cao lau, mi Quang, and Hoi An chicken rice are products of a centuries-long local adaptation and intercultural impact, whereas the reason behind Da Nang's openness, dynamism, and creativity is the culture of seafood and street food (Avieli, 2013). With the ever-growing tourism, the culinary traditions of Hoi An

and Da Nang are increasingly becoming cultural products with a global brand name, and this leads to intercultural discourse as well as raising some issues of sustainability and authenticity.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the culinary identity, intercultural exchange, and development of Hoi An and Da Nang within a contemporary context. This methodology facilitates the systematic gathering and analysis of secondary sources, ensuring a comprehensive examination of culinary peculiarities, historical factors, tourism impacts, and modernization trends. The research focuses on the following key areas:

- Regional culinary identity and the distinguishing characteristics of Central Vietnamese cuisine;
- The historical influence of foreign cuisines on local dishes;
- The impact of tourism on culinary heritage and perceived authenticity;
- Strategic approaches to balancing modernization with tradition;
- The adaptation of local food culture to urban and global trends.

The qualitative design ensures that the data gathered is rich, contextualized, and reflective of the complex interplay between culinary practices and cultural perceptions.

#### 3.2 Population and sampling Framework

This research did not involve direct participants; instead, it utilized a secondary data analysis approach, synthesizing structured information and expert insights gathered from various online repositories. These sources included peer-reviewed academic publications, official government tourism portals, and specialized culinary media focusing on the gastronomy of Hoi An and Da Nang. To ensure data integrity and credibility, all information—including specific inquiries and responses retrieved—was systematically cross-referenced and attributed to its original source. By aggregating data from these diverse digital platforms, the study constructs a comprehensive and reliable portrayal of the local culinary landscape.

#### 3.3 Data collection

Data for this study were systematically retrieved from a range of credible digital sources, including peer-reviewed academic articles, official tourism

promotion platforms, and authoritative culinary guides. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How the distinctive ingredients and techniques (e.g., shrimp paste, chili, local herbs) shape the culinary identity of Hoi An and Da Nang.
2. Historical foreign influences (Chinese, Japanese, French) and their reflections in modern cuisine.
3. Effects of international tourism on the commodification of culinary heritage.
4. Strategies implemented by local authorities and communities to preserve authentic culinary traditions.
5. Adaptation of local food culture to modern lifestyles and global trends (fusion cuisine, delivery apps, cafe culture).

#### 3.4 Instrument

To ensure systematic analysis, the data were organized into a structured matrix comprising the following categories: Question, Response, Key Detail, and Source Reference. This tabular format provides a transparent audit trail for all retrieved information, facilitating a rigorous content analysis of recurring patterns within the culinary cultures of Hoi An and Da Nang.

- Flavor perception and identity markers (spicy/salty taste, herbs, seafood emphasis)
- Recognition of foreign culinary influences (Cao Lầu, Bánh Mì, Com Gà)
- Awareness of tourism-driven commodification of traditional dishes
- Perceptions of modernization and adaptation to urban lifestyles (fusion cuisine, digital ordering, cafe culture)
- Satisfaction with culinary authenticity and quality

The format ensured broad accessibility and convenience for respondents, while standardizing responses for qualitative analysis

### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The information was grouped into five research questions and answers that concerned the culinary culture of Central Vietnam and its connection to tourism development in Hoi An and Da Nang. Both themes bring to the fore the influence of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors on the development of the regional food identity and its contribution to tourism.

Q1: What are the unique products and cooking methods of Central Vietnam, including using Shrimp paste, chili, and Vietnamese herbs, that contribute to the popularity of the specific culinary traditions of Hoi An and Da Nang?

1. Flavor Intensity: Central Vietnamese cuisine is much spicier and saltier than the North, and generally less sweet than the South, which prefers coconut milk and sugar, which forms a strong, more outspoken palate.
2. Fermented Products: Due to the extensive use of fermented shrimp paste (mam) and fish sauce, they give the Northern cooking of the area a distinctive pungency and richness uncommon to everyday cooking elsewhere, forming a regional aroma.
3. Minimal Broth and Noodles: Northern Pho Dishes such as Mi Quang traditionally make use of copious, clear, and complex broths, whereas Central noodle dishes (e.g., Mi Quang) use minimal, concentrated, and concise broth (sauce-like), which is a significant technical distinction.
4. Influence of Local Herbs: The use of fresh herbs, especially those of Tra Que Vegetable Village, is an aspect of the food identity, which gives a fresh, aromatic appearance to the rich and spicy primary ingredients.
5. Coastal Specialization: The coastal position implies the focus on fresh seafood and specialty rice products (banh) manufactured using the local milled grains, as the culinary identity is directly linked with the local immediate geography and environment.

Q2: What are the most significant historical foreign influences (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, French) on the core dishes of Hoi An and Da Nang, and how are these influences currently reflected in the local food scene?

Content analysis of question 1:

1. Japanese & Chinese Noodle Influence: Cao Lầu noodles are a key example, with the process often cited as having Japanese (soba) influence for its unique texture, while the accompanying pork and broth show clear Chinese seasoning techniques. Cao Lầu exemplifies combined Japanese (noodle) and Chinese (pork/broth) techniques.
2. Chinese Diaspora: The Hoi An Chicken Rice (Com Gà) is often linked to the cuisine of the

Chinese diaspora, using methods like poaching the chicken and preparing the rice with chicken fat and turmeric, demonstrating a clear cultural import. Chinese techniques influenced staple dishes like Com Gà.

3. French Colonial Legacy: The French introduction of the baguette is the most enduring mark, leading to the Bánh Mì, a perfect fusion of French bread with local Vietnamese fillings, pate, and herbs. The French baguette led to the iconic Bánh Mì fusion sandwich.
4. Modern Pan-Asian & Western Fusion: The modern Da Nang/Hoi An scene reflects current exchange, with a proliferation of Korean, Japanese, and Western fusion restaurants, directly catering to the major source markets of international tourists. Current fusion restaurants adapt to the tastes of modern tourist markets (Korea, Japan, and the West).
5. Culinary Skills Transfer: The establishment of cooking schools, often run by local chefs, involves the transfer and adaptation of traditional Vietnamese cooking techniques to foreign tourists, promoting cultural exchange through education. Cooking classes facilitate the transfer of local techniques to foreigners.

Q3: To what extent has the rapid growth of international tourism, particularly in Hoi An, led to the commodification or “invention” of culinary heritage, and how does this affect the authentic food consumption of the local community?

Content analysis of question 1:

1. Invented Culinary Heritage: Certain dishes like White Rose dumplings and Cao Lầu have been heavily commodified and simplified by tourist-focused restaurants, leading to a version that is specifically tailored for the tourist palate. Simplification and heavy promotion of a few dishes for tourists.
2. Dual Food Systems: A dual food system exists: one for tourists (restaurants featuring “Local Specialties”) and an “unapproachable” heritage for locals (less-known street stalls, home cooking) who avoid the tourist-centric venues. Locals often eat different dishes in non-tourist-focused venues.
3. Economic Pressure and Displacement: The commercial pressures from tourism have

caused some traditional food sellers to relocate or sell to tourist-facing businesses, sometimes raising ingredient costs for local consumers. Commercial pressure drives up costs and causes the displacement of local vendors.

4. **Tailored Authenticity:** Hosts adapt by providing “tailored authenticity,” which means creating a safe, clean, and comfortable experience for foreign tourists while attempting to maintain the 'look' of traditional dishes. Hosts adapt food preparation for tourist comfort and safety standards.
5. **Income Generation for Communities:** Culinary activities, particularly at sites like the Tra Que Vegetable Village, create stable livelihoods and diversified income for local farmers and residents by integrating agricultural heritage with tourism. Tourism creates direct income for traditional food/agriculture communities.

**Q4:** What specific strategies are local authorities and communities in Da Nang and Hoi An implementing to balance modernization and the pressure of globalization with the need to preserve authentic culinary traditions and food safety standards?

1. **Tourism Restructuring & Branding:** Da Nang has a long-term plan (e.g., until 2025/2030) to restructure its tourism industry, explicitly branding its cuisine as a unique tourism product to drive economic growth while preserving regional authenticity. Official city plans focus on promoting and preserving cuisine as a unique asset.
2. **Community-Based Heritage Preservation:** Hoi An focuses on developing community-based tourism in suburban areas, like the Tra Que Vegetable Village and Thanh Ha Pottery Village, to preserve both agricultural and food-related craft heritage. Tra Que Village uses tourism to sustain traditional farming and food practices.
3. **Documentation and Digitalization:** There are efforts to digitize and document Hoi An's heritage, which implicitly includes the documentation of traditional recipes and culinary practices to safeguard them against cultural dilution. Digital projects are being used to document heritage, including food culture.
4. **Stakeholder Collaboration for Safety:** Local authorities recognize the need for cooperation

between food producers, chefs, and local enterprises to uphold quality and food safety standards to ensure the sustainability and consumer trust of the culinary product. Local authorities are strengthening networks to ensure food safety and quality.

5. **Culinary Events and Promotion:** The Da Nang Tourism Promotion Centre actively organizes food festivals and competitions and uses modern platforms (YouTube, TikTok) to promote the city's famous dishes, focusing attention on local tradition. Food festivals and digital campaigns promote traditional dishes and local expertise.

**Q5:** How is the local food culture in Da Nang, a rapidly urbanizing metropolitan area, adapting to modern Vietnamese lifestyles and global food trends (e.g., fusion cuisine, food delivery, coffee culture) while still maintaining its core traditional characteristics?

1. **Coexistence of Food Systems:** The traditional, vibrant street food system exists side by side with the growth of the modern malls, large restaurants, and international franchises, which can provide both the traditional and new global cuisines to the inhabitants of the city.
2. **Fusion Cuisine Acceptance:** The cosmopolitan character of the city permits the fusion cuisine (e.g., modern Vietnamese/Western, or Korean/Japanese-inspired), which represents the preferences of the young and fast-growing urban population and the high concentration of expatriates.
3. **Digital Adaptation:** Traditional dishes and local eateries are increasingly available on food delivery apps, showing how traditional food culture adapts its distribution methods to modern urban lifestyles and convenience demands. Food delivery apps are used to distribute traditional local dishes.
4. **Flourishing Cafe Culture:** The historical French influence on coffee has evolved into a highly dynamic and modern cafe culture, which is a primary social and leisure activity for young Vietnamese professionals in Da Nang. French-influenced coffee culture is now a major modern urban social activity.
5. **Retail Market Diversification:** Rapid urbanization and tourism have created a stronger market for diverse F&B products, including imported items, reflecting a growing

consumer base with exposure to international food trends and higher spending power. Growing demand for imported food and beverage products due to urbanization.

Overall, the findings indicate that:

- The focus on bravery in flavors and fermented elements, and the balance of herbs are the main culinary specifics of Central Vietnam.
- The exchange of cultures in the past has resulted in a stratified cultural identity that is still evident in local cuisine.
- Heritage has been commercialized by tourism, yet it has brought about new sources of income and familiarity around the world.
- Local governments use combined mechanisms of preservation, which combine cultural protection and economic promotion.
- The case of modernization in Da Nang is a case of adaptation with no cultural erasure and shows the strength of the Vietnamese culinary identity against globalization.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The results identify several key themes regarding the culinary identity and tourism development of Hoi An and Da Nang:

- **Distinct Regional Identity:** Central Vietnamese cuisine maintains a formidable identity that distinguishes it from Northern and Southern traditions. This is characterized by a preference for pungent flavors, shrimp paste, fresh aromatics, and highly concentrated broths.
- **Historical Culinary Syncretism:** Cross-cultural influences are deeply embedded in iconic local dishes. This legacy is evident in the Japanese-influenced *cao lau*, Chinese-inspired *com ga*, and the French-influenced *banh mi*. Furthermore, modern tourism continues to introduce new fusion styles into the region.
- **Evolution of the Food Landscape:** Tourism has significantly reshaped the local food culture, leading to the re-engineering of traditional dishes to accommodate international palates. In Hoi An, this has resulted in a bifurcated food system where dedicated tourist-centric offerings co-exist alongside authentic local practices.
- **Institutional Heritage Preservation:** Local authorities are actively safeguarding culinary heritage through policy implementation,

gastronomic festivals, vocational training, and digital documentation, all while strategically promoting tourism growth.

- **Modern Adaptability:** Da Nang demonstrates a high capacity for modern adaptation. While digital delivery platforms, specialty cafes, and international trends are flourishing, they complement rather than displace the city's resilient traditional street food culture.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

In summary, the gastronomic cultures of Hoi An and Da Nang function as dynamic systems shaped by tradition, history, geography, and the contemporary pressures of tourism. While the influx of tourism offers significant opportunities for economic growth and internationalization, it simultaneously poses a challenge to the authenticity and sustainability of local culinary practices. These findings underscore a critical need for strategic equilibrium between cultural preservation and modernization. By treating gastronomy as both a cultural heritage and an economic asset, local authorities and communities can develop frameworks that safeguard the identity, quality, and long-term viability of the region's food culture.

This study contributes to the scholarship on Vietnamese culinary heritage by examining the identities of Hoi An and Da Nang through the lens of intercultural exchange and urban transformation. While previous research has often focused narrowly on the historical development of Hoi An or the general role of food in tourism, this paper offers a comparative analysis that reveals how local traditions, migration, trade history, and globalization intersect. By situating food within broader socio-cultural and economic interactions, this research demonstrates that culinary identity is not a static relic, but a continuously negotiated process. This integrated approach provides a deeper understanding of how Central Vietnamese cuisines function as both potent cultural symbols and evolving platforms for global engagement.

## 7.0 STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study relies predominantly on qualitative secondary data sourced from online publications, reports, and websites; consequently, it may not fully capture the diverse perspectives of all stakeholders. Geographically, the research is confined to Hoi An and Da Nang, and thus the findings may not be generalizable to the broader Vietnamese culinary landscape. Furthermore, as the study did not involve

primary data collection—such as direct interviews, surveys, or field observations—the results should be considered preliminary. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches, incorporating interviews with chefs, local residents, and tourists to validate and expand upon these findings.

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## APPENDICES



Figure 1: *Traditional deconstructed wrap platter in Da Nang. Components include thinly sliced pork belly (protein), green mango (acid), and a variety of regional herbs including banana blossom. This arrangement emphasizes the diner's role in flavor construction.*



Figure 2: *Central-style Bánh Xèo featuring a turmeric-infused rice flour base. The porous, crispy texture is designed to be broken down and wrapped in rice paper, a technique that highlights the region's mastery of rice-based starch products.*



Figure 3: A comparative display of Kem Bơ (Avocado-Coconut Ice Cream) in Da Nang. This dish exemplifies the regional adaptation of tropical lipids into the dessert palate. The vertical stratification—from the viscous fruit base to the desiccated coconut topping—demonstrates the "textural sequencing" common in Central Vietnamese gastronomy.



*Figure 4: Thick chewy Cao Lầu noodles in Hoi An. Cao Lầu, a signature dish of Hoi An. It is defined by thick, firm noodles treated with local alkaline well-water, served with a concentrated pork reduction and crispy fried dough for textural contrast.*