



MELAKA AS A FOOD TOURISM DESTINATION IN MALAYSIA: DOMESTIC TOURIST EXPERIENCE

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Abstract:

Melaka was awarded as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO on 7 July 2008 due to 500 years of development and its role in trading and cultural exchange between Eastern and Western world countries in the Straits of Melaka. The rich history makes Melaka a multi-ethnic cultural heritage and historical tourist destination in Malaysia, mainly food. This study aims to identify the variety of local food in Melaka offered to tourists and review the experience of domestic tourists in Melaka, specifically in food eaten, eatery locations, and foods brought as souvenirs. A total of 297 respondent participated in this study, and a convenience sampling method was applied. The result showed that 65 different menus and drinks from Malay, Chinese, Indian, Baba-Nyonya, and Portuguese ethnic enjoyed by domestic tourists. Malay food is the primary choice of most respondents, while *asam pedas* (spicy sour) is the most favourite food among tourist. Most domestic tourists enjoy local food at restaurant and market/street food accessible around Melaka city. *Dodol*, a type of Malay sweets, was the most purchased food as a souvenir.

Keywords:

Tourism, Food Tourism, Domestic Tourist, Eating Behaviour, Melaka

Introduction

Food (including beverage) is a basic human need consumed two or three times per day for each individual wherever they are, including travelling. For some tourist, food is one of the motivations for travelling (Kim and Eves, 2012; Barbel-Pineda et al., 2016; Kim, Park & Lamb, 2019; Nicoletti et al., 2019; Perez-Preigo et al., 2019). Food tourism is one of the themes in cultural heritage tourism besides performance, religion, museum, architecture, historical site *etc.* In many countries and regions, national food has become a cultural heritage tourism

product widely promoted to attract tourists. Example of national food is pizza in Italy, sushi in Japan, taco in Mexico *etc.* Some national foods are promoted as health food/diet, such as Atlantic Diet (Velho, Pinheiro & Rodrigues, 2016) and Mediterranean Diet (Altimore et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2015). Malaysia has various national food from each state derived from three major ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Example of Malaysia national food is *nasi lemak*, *roti canai* and *teh tarik*. Melaka has additional national food derived from Baba-Nyonya and Portuguese ethnic. Example of Melaka's famous national food is *asam pedas*, *cencaluk*, *dodol*, *kuih keria*, *laksa Nyonya*, *asam laksa*, *nasi Portugis* *etc.* This study aimed to examine the behaviour of domestic tourists in Melaka regarding local food preferences, favourite eateries, and food brought as souvenirs.

Literature Review

Domestic Tourism

According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is an activity when a person travels and stay in places outside the usual environment for less than one consecutive years for leisure, business and other purposes (UNWTO, 2010). Domestic tourism comprises resident visitors within the country without crossing the international border (UNWTO, 2010). Domestic tourism is the key driver of the global tourism sector and contributes to 73% of total travel and tourism spending (WTTC, 2018). According to this report, domestic tourists spend 80% higher than international tourists in certain countries. The growth of domestic tourism is due to an increase or sizeable middle-class population, increase in domestic consumer power, size of the countries, government's initiatives to promote the new location and improving infrastructure and economic link between different internal regions.

Domestic tourism limited the flow of money abroad and encouraged local resources utilisation by creating employment opportunities, reducing unemployment and poverty, and boost domestic business chain growth. Apart from that, excessive dependence on international tourist will affect the local tourism industry as it is exposed to the current global situation. Domestic tourism promotes regional economic growth and development by infrastructure investment in rural areas that benefit the local.

In 2018, 221.3 million domestic visitors were recorded, and RM 92 561 million was spent compared to 205.4 million visitors and RM 83 103 million spent in 2017 (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2018; Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2019^a). A similar report state that visiting relative and friends (VRF) was the primary purpose of travelling (40.6%), followed by shopping (34.7%) and holiday/leisure/relaxation (10.4%). Based on the state, Selangor (30.179 million) was the most visited state by the domestic tourist, followed by Sabah (20.36 million), Sarawak (19.380 million), Kuala Lumpur (19.165 million) and Pahang (18.111 million) (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2019^b). Melaka is ranked 10th in which account for 13.123 million visitors. Domestic tourism in Malaysia can grow due to its abundant attractive tourist spots, especially tourists from Peninsular Malaysia who want to travel to Sabah and Sarawak and vice versa.

Food Tourism

Gastronomy tourism (Sahin, 2015; Privitera, Nedelcu & Nicula, 2018; Meneguel, Mundet & Aulet, 2019), culinary tourism (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Nicoletti et al., 2019), and food tourism (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016)

are terms used to express a relation between food and tourism depending on perspective and mother tongue (World Food Travel Association, 2020). Gastronomy is the arts and knowledge involved in preparing and eating good food. Gastronomy originates from Greek words, *gastro*, defined as stomach, and *nomos* refers to knowledge or regulation. The concept of gastronomy is abundant as it studies the food tradition origins (including all types of beverages) within social, economic, and geographical aspects (Gillespie, 2011). According to Kivela and Crotts (2006), the first formal study of gastronomy was conducted by Frenchmen Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, published in '*La Physiologie du gout*' in 1825 and has been translated into English as 'The Physiology of Taste'. The study has paved the way for subsequent scientific studies on senses of food and beverage consumption.

Nowadays, national food products have become an essential tourism product and marketed to boost tourism. According to Hall and Sharples (2013), food tourism defines as a trip to a gastronomic region for recreational or entertainment purposes related to food such as visits to the primary or secondary producer of food, gastronomic festival, food fairs events, farmers' market, cooking shows or demonstration, testing of a quality food product. Food tourism can generate economic development for a tourism destination, such as create job opportunity, tax revenue and foreign exchange (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Meneguel, Mundet & Aulet, 2019). Food can be used as a tool to promote and market tourism destination (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Jalis, Che & Markwell, 2014; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Sahin, 2015). Food tourism can also boost the destination's reputation – create, improve and convey a positive image (Lin, Pearson & Cai, 2011; Lai, Khoo-Lattimore & Wang, 2019). Example of food tourism countries is Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Portugal, USA (particularly California's Napa and Sonoma Valley area), Brazil, Peru, Mexico, South Africa, Australia, Chile, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, Bali, China and Singapore (UNWTO, 2012).

Melaka as a Historical and Cultural Heritage Tourism Destination

Due to its long, rich history, Melaka has abundant food in line with society's ethnic and cultural diversity. Malay Sultanate in Malaysia began in Melaka when Parameswara founded Melaka in the 1400s. Melaka has grown into an important trading hub in the Southeast Asia region, connecting the Eastern and Western world. Traders from China, India (Gujarat), Arab, Ceylon, Burmese, Persian, and Malay World (Java, Pasai, Maluku, *etc.*) trade their product in Melaka. Some traders have assimilated into the local community, and some have married local people, giving birth to a new ethnic such as Baba-Nyonya and Indian-Muslim. Melaka was also colonised by the Portuguese (130 years), the Dutch (180 years), the British and the Japanese during World War II.

Melaka is a famous historical and cultural heritage destination for both local and international tourist. On 7 July 2008, Melaka and Georgetown in Penang were awarded as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO due to its 500 years of development and its role as a city connecting the Eastern and Western world via trading and cultural exchange Straits of Melaka. Example of historical remains presently located in Melaka is Fort of A'famosa, St. Paul Church, the Stadthuys Building, Dutch Fort on the St. John Hill, Independence Monument Building *etc.* Melaka has over 30 museums, managed by the government or individual/organisation that preserve the rich history and culture of Melaka. Some famous museum in Melaka is Melaka Sultanate Museum, Maritime Museum (Flora de lar Mar Maritime Museum), Stadthus Museum, Cheng Ho Cultural Museum, Baba-Nyonya Museum, Malay and Islamic World Museum, and many others. Melaka also has traditional settlement such as Kampung Motem

(Malay traditional village), Kampung Portugis (Portuguese settlement) and Kampung Chetti. Chetti is a sub-community consisting of hybrid ethnic descendants of 14th-century Indian-Tamil merchants settled in Melaka married local women.

Melaka as a Food Tourism Destination

The ethnic diversity makes Melaka a state with a rich cultural heritage, including food. Malay, Chinese and Indian are the three major ethnic group in Malaysia and cuisines from the three ethnic groups are widely found throughout the country. Eateries with different names based on the ethnic group can be found commonly, such as *nasi campur* restaurant, *warung/kedai kopi* (Malay), *kopitiam*, *bah kut teh* restaurant (Chinese), banana leaf restaurant (Indian), *mamak* restaurant, *nasi kandar* restaurant (Indian-Muslim) *etc.* Local food can also be enjoyed at other premises such as a food court, roadside stall, food truck, market, *pasar malam* (night market), and street food and tourist hotspot. Local food is also available at fine dining eateries such as a hotel or modern restaurants.

Besides Malay, Indian and Chinese, Melaka has additional cuisines from the Baba-Nyonya and the Portuguese ethnic. Baba-Nyonya and Portuguese communities in Melaka has their unique traditional food. Baba-Nyonya ethnic, known as *Peranakan*, is descendants of Chinese traders who intermarried with the local people. Baba-Nyonya communities can be widely found in Melaka and Penang state. Baba-Nyonya cuisine is influenced by Malay, Chinese and other countries such as Thailand, India, Holland, Portugal and England. Among the famous Baba-Nyonya food are *Nyonya Laksa*, *Chicken Kapitan*, *Inchi Kabin*, *Pindang bandeng*, *Pongteh* and *Nyonya cendol*. Portuguese community primarily resides in the Portuguese settlement or Kampung Portugis, located at the outskirts of Melaka city, comprising approximately twenty-eight acres of land with about 1 200 residents. *Nasi Portugis*, *Devil's Curry*, *Garing-garing* and *Ikan Bakar Portugis* are traditional Portuguese food to enjoy in Melaka.

Table 1: Example of the Local Food Found In Melaka.

Ethnic Group	Local food
Malay	<i>Asam pedas, nasi lemak, cencaluk, dodol, kuih</i> (assorted), <i>rendang</i> .
Chinese	<i>Dim sum, ba kut teh</i> , Hainan chicken rice, <i>asam laksa</i> .
Indian/Indian Muslim	Banana leaf, <i>capati, roti canai, tosai, cendol, rojak, tandoori</i> .
Baba Nyonya	<i>Nyonya Laksa, Chicken Kapitan, Inchi Kabin, Pindang bandeng, Pongteh, Nyonya cendol</i> .
Portouguese	<i>Nasi Portugis, Devil's Curry, Garing-garing, Ikan Bakar Portugis</i> .

Methodology

This study uses questionnaire form as the primary research method. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the respondent's background information and eating experience in Melaka (food eaten, place to eat, and food brought as souvenir). Face to face survey was applied, and a total of 297 respondent, consisted of domestic tourist visiting the Melaka city World Heritage Site were involved. A survey method is used to characterize the trends and identify domestic tourists' opinion, important belief and attitude (According to Creswell, 2012). The data collected is processed using IBM Statistic Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 software, and statistic descriptive was applied.

Result and Finding

Respondent Background

Table 2 shows the general background information of the 297 respondents. The majority of the respondents are female (55.6%), ages between 20 to 29 years (48.5%), Malay ethnic group (84.5%), from the state of Selangor (21.2%), possess a degree and above education level (45.1%), working in the private sector (27.6%) and income between RM 2000 – RM 2999 per month (27.9%). Most domestic tourists visit Melaka for a holiday (74.7%), followed by family matters (4.7%), personal matters (4.4%) and others reason (6.1%).

Table 2: Respondent Demographic Characteristic

Profile	Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	132	44.4
	Female	165	55.6
Ages	Below 20 years	25	8.4
	20 – 29 years	144	48.5
	30 – 39 years	63	21.2
	40 – 49 years	46	15.5
	50 years and above	19	6.4
Ethnic Group	Malay	251	84.5
	Chinese	20	6.7
	Indian	12	4.0
	Others	14	4.8
State	Johor	35	11.8
	Kedah	16	5.4
	Kelantan	27	9.1
	Melaka	21	7.1
	Negeri Sembilan	21	7.1
	Pahang	31	10.4
	Perlis	3	1.0
	Perak	19	6.4
	Pulau Pinang	7	2.4
	Selangor	63	21.2
	Sabah	14	4.7
	Terengganu	15	5.1
	Education	F.T. Kuala Lumpur	25
Primary		4	1.3
SRP/PMR/PT3		9	3.0
SPM		69	23.2
STPM/Diploma		75	25.3
Degree and above		132	45.1
Other		6	2.0
Work	Government servant	71	23.9
	Private sector	82	27.6
	Self-employed	43	14.5
	Housewife	12	4.0
	Student	71	23.9
	Not working	18	16.1

Monthly income	Below RM 1000	32	10.8
	RM 1000 – RM 1999	56	18.9
	RM 2000 – RM 2999	83	27.9
	RM 3000 – RM 3999	80	26.9
	RM 4000 – RM 4999	21	7.1
	RM 5000 and above	25	8.4
Reason	Holiday	222	74.7
	Working/business	30	10.1
	Family matters	14	4.7
	Personal	13	4.4
	Other's reason	18	6.1

Source: Field Work

Eating Experience

Referring to Figure-1, most respondents (122 or 37.7 %) stated that eating was their main activities (very important) in Melaka. 123 or 38% of respondents stated important, and 57 or 19.2% stated moderately important. In contrast, only 15 or 5% of respondents stated eating is not their main activity in Melaka (not important/not important at all). It is observed from Figure-1 that domestic tourist has made food a significant motivation for travelling to Melaka. As previously discussed, tourists can try abundant local foods, such as *asam pedas*, *Nyonya laksa*, *ikan bakar*, *kuih keria*, and coconut shake. The following discussion focused on the food preferences of domestic tourist in Melaka.

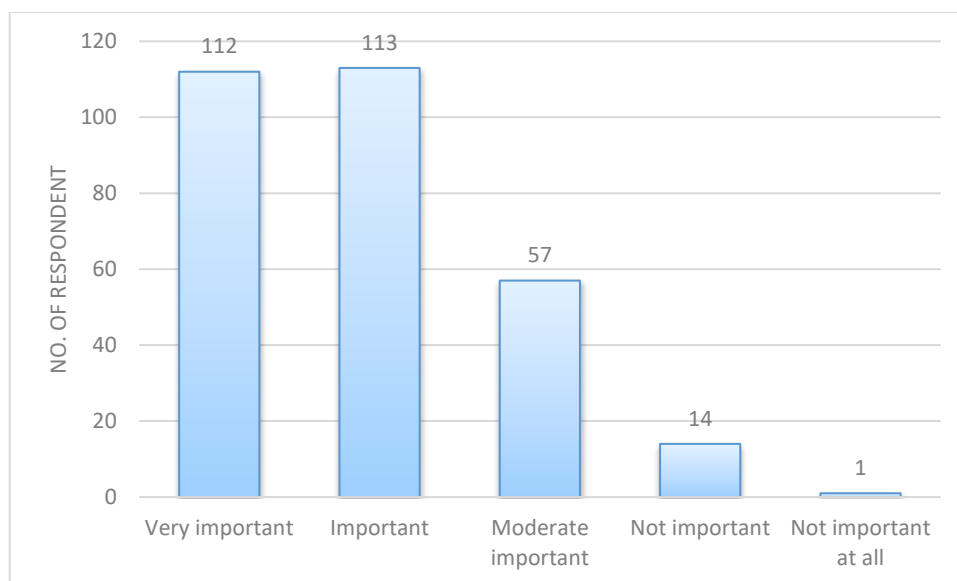


Figure 1: Priorities of Eating Activity of the Respondent

Source: Field Work

Based on Figure-2, Malay food is the most popular food eaten by domestic tourist in Melaka (96%), followed by Baba-Nyonya food (31.6%), Chinese food (19.5%), Indian food (12.1%), Portuguese food (8.4%) and others local food (5.7%). The result shows that more than half of respondents ate more than one type of food based on the ethnic group. Malay food is the most preferred cuisine since most respondents are from the Malay Muslim ethnic (refer to Table-2). Based on the Holy Quran, Muslims have a strict diet consisting of halal food and forbade eating

pig and drinking alcohol. The limited non-Malay eatery that offers halal food causes a low percentage of respondents to eat other ethnic group foods. Non-Malay food vendors that sell halal food must be proactive in advertising their halal cuisines to attract Malay ethnic tourist. Food vendors can also obtain halal certification from the state's Islamic Religion Department to reassure Muslim tourists, domestic or international.

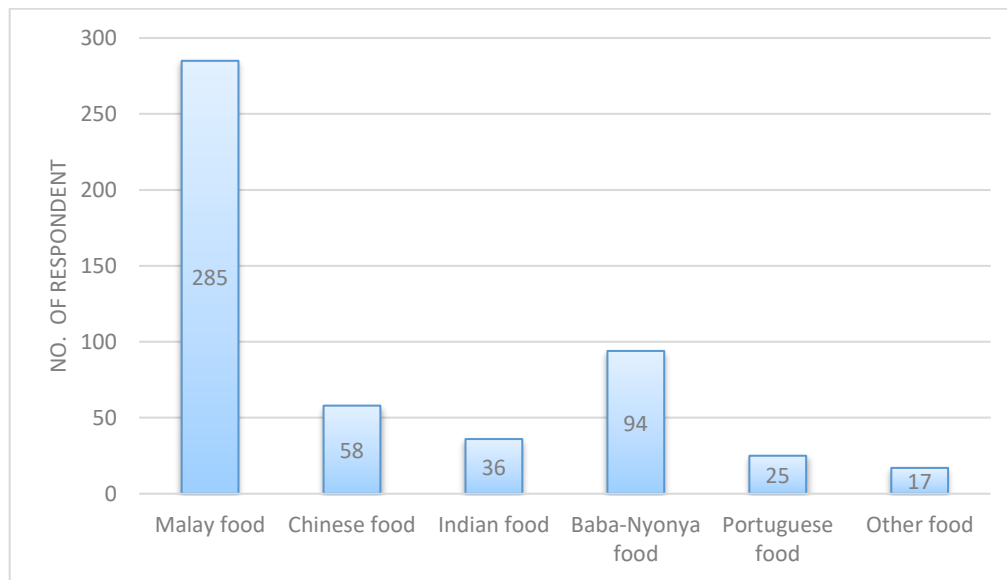


Figure 2: Local Food Enjoyed By the Respondent in Melaka

Source: Field Work

As shown in Table 3, the most popular local food menu for domestic tourist is *asam pedas* (240 or 68.7 %), followed by *kuih keria* (74 respondent), *dodol* (73 respondent), *cencaluk* (47 respondent), *cendol* (42 respondent), *ikan bakar* (29 respondent), coconut shake (16 respondent), *kuih bakar berlauk* (15 respondent), *Nyonya Laksa* (14 respondent), *nasi lemak* (14 respondent), *nasi ayam* (10 respondent), and *sambal belacan* (10 respondent). There are 56 others local food enjoyed by the respondent, as shown in Table-3. However, the numbers of menus enjoy by the respondent may be greater since respondents do not know or remember the name of the particular menu.

Table 3: Menu Enjoy By Respondent While in Melaka

Food Menu	Frequency
<i>Asam pedas</i>	204
<i>Kuih keria</i>	74
<i>Dodol</i>	73
<i>Cencaluk</i>	47
<i>Cendol</i>	42
<i>Ikan bakar</i>	29
Coconut shake	18
<i>Tapai</i>	16
<i>Kuih bakar berlauk</i>	15
<i>Laksa-Nyonya</i>	14
<i>Nasi lemak</i>	14
<i>Nasi ayam, sambal belacan</i>	10

<i>Kuih Onde-onde</i>	9
<i>Roti canai</i>	8
<i>Nasi Portugis, putu piring</i>	7
<i>Lempeng, Mee kari</i>	6
<i>Kuih bulan</i>	5
<i>Dim sum, satay</i>	4
<i>Kuih baulu, nasi goreng, nasin kunyit</i>	3
<i>Kari ikan, keropok, ABC, mango float, buah berangan, cakoi, rojak buah</i>	2
<i>Durian puff, kari ayam, kari daging, kuey teow goreng, kuih kapit, kuih karas, kuih koci, kuih pulut kacang, kuih sagu, wajik, lontong, lai chi kang, fish ball, ee ti ba, mee tarik, yong tau fu, ayam tandoori, capati, roti naan, mee bandung, ayam masak merah, kaliaan ikan masin, rendang, sambal goreng, sambal kupang, sup lembu, tom yam, nasi ayam penyek, nasi biryani, nasi kukus, nasi tomato, nasi ulam roti john.</i>	1

Source: Field Work

Asam pedas is a well-known local delicacy of Melaka enjoyed by domestic tourists and is considered Melaka's traditional cuisine and *cencaluk*, *belacan*, and *dodol*. The Melaka cuisine experience is considered incomplete if the tourist does not try *asam pedas*. *Asam pedas* has various version based on state, region, and ethnic group in Malaysia such as *asam pedas Johor*, *asam pedas Kedah*, *asam pedas Sarawak*, and *asam pedas Nyonya*. Common ingredients used for *asam pedas* include onion, ginger, chilis paste, tamarind juice, turmeric, fermented shrimp paste, salt, *daun kesum* and water. *Asam pedas Melaka* has additional unique ingredients such as fenugreek seeds (*halba*), cumin seeds (*jintan*), candle nut (*buah keras*), galangal and use a kaffir lime leafs instead of *daun kesum* for the aromatic (Jais, 2016).

Kuih keria is a Malay traditional doughnut made from wheat flour, rice flour and sweet potatoes are coated with white sugar. In Melaka, *kuih keria* becomes increasingly popular and viral as the white sugar coating is replaced to palm sugar/*gula Melaka*, remarket as *kuih keria antarabangsa* or international *kuih keria*. *Dodol* is a famous sweet in Melaka made from rice flour, coconut milk, white sugar and palm sugar/*gula Melaka*. The processes are tedious as the ingredient need to be stirred continuously for three to four hours in a large pan. The *dodols* comes with various colour and flavour. The original *dodol* was dark brown, but some *dodol* is yellow with *durian* flavour and green with *pandan* flavour. *Cencaluk* is made from a mixture of shrimp, rice, and salt and marinated in a bottle for several days. It usually served as a sauce together with chills, shallots and lime juice. Both *dodol* and *cencaluk* are among the famous food that tourist often brought home as a souvenir.

Meanwhile, *Cendol* is a famous iced sweet dessert containing grated ice, droplets of green rice flour jelly (*cendol*), coconut milk and palm sugar syrup. *Cendol* can be added with an additional variety of ingredients such as red bean, sweet corn, glutinous rice, grass jelly, and '*durian*'. It is ideally enjoying during hot weather in the afternoon.

Place to Eat

Melaka has a varied selection of dining places accessible in Melaka city. Tourist can choose their favourites dining places depending on their budget, comfort, convenience, safety, hygiene, taste, variety of choice, ambience and relationship with the local community. Examples of dining places are hotels, restaurants, food courts, street food trucks, markets, food trucks, roadside shops, and roadside stalls. Tourists that prefer comfort, convenience, and

safety with no budget constrain can enjoy dining in a hotel or fine dining restaurant. In contrast, tourists who want to experience the local community atmosphere with a limited budget can enjoy food at the food court, market, street food, food truck, roadside shop, and roadside stall.

Figure-3 shows that respondent visit more than one dining place to enjoy local food in Melaka. Most domestic tourists (198 or 66.7 % of respondent) prefer to eat at the restaurant followed by market/street food (173 or 58.2% of respondent), food court (171 or 57.6% of respondent), roadside shop (133 or 44.8% of respondent), roadside stall (117 or 39.4% of respondent), in the hotel (51 or 17.2% of respondent), food truck (43 or 14.5% of respondent) and other places (12 or 4% of respondent). As observed in Figure-4, the restaurant remained the main dining places (130 or 43.8% of respondent) followed by food court (60 or 20.2% of respondent), roadside stall (36 or 12.1%), market/street food (27 or 9.1% of respondent), hotel (10 or 3.4% of respondent) and roadside shop (6 or 2% of respondent). The overall result indicates that comfort is not a significant factor in choosing eateries among domestic tourist. The dining environment in Melaka is similar to other states in Malaysia, making it easy to find a dining place in Melaka.

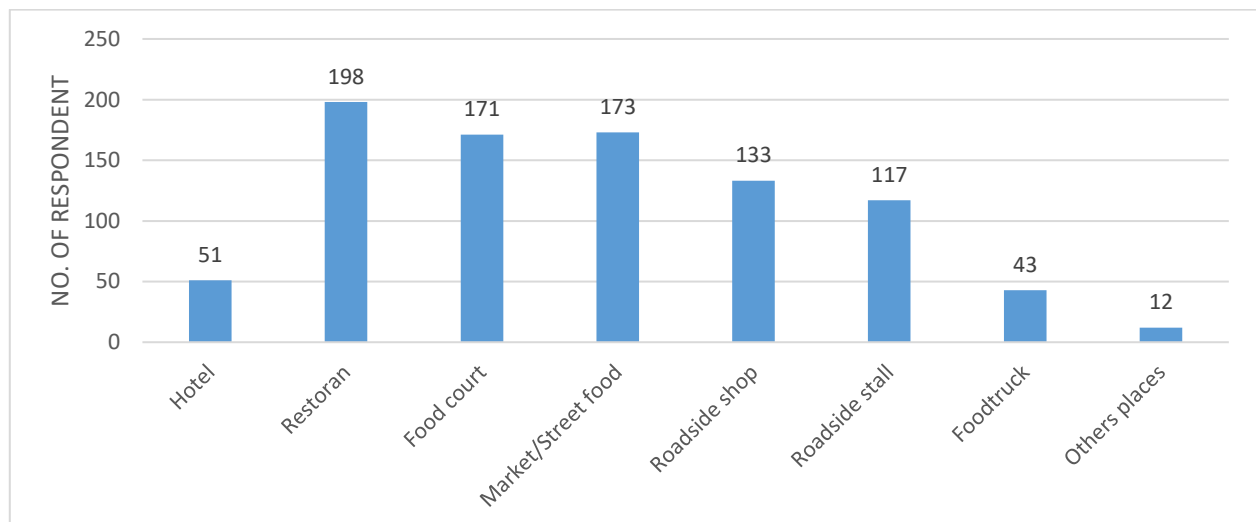


Figure 3: Dining Places of Respondent

Source: Field work

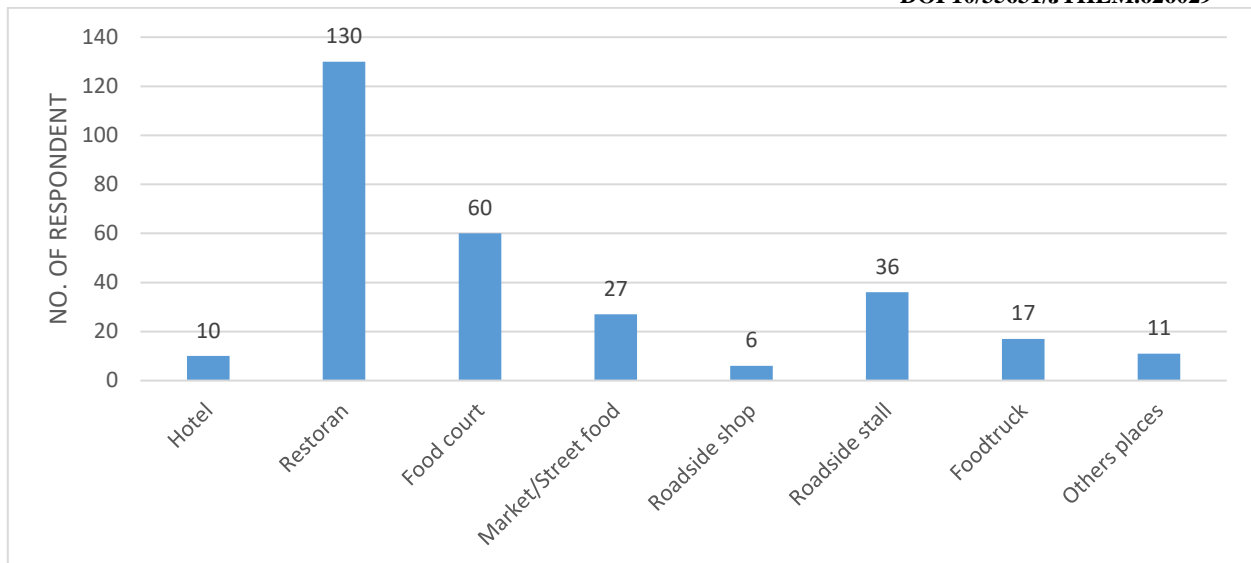


Figure 4: Main Dining Places of Respondent

Source: Field work

Food Brought as a Souvenir

Some tourists purchase food as a souvenir since food symbolises memory or as a gift for family members and friends. Referring to Table-4, 59.9% or 178 respondents bought food and food products as a souvenir. *Dodol* (87 respondent), *cencaluk* (67 respondent) and *belacan* (46 respondent) are the three main foods brought as a souvenir. Besides the famous local delicacy of Melaka, the three foods are particularly suitable for souvenirs as they are durable and easy to store and carry. Other foods brought as souvenirs are *kuih keria* and *kerepek* (25 respondent each), *gula Melaka*/palm sugar (11 respondent), *asam pedas* paste (9 respondent) and *sagon* (6 respondent).

Table 4: Food and Food Product Bought as a Souvenir by Respondent

Food/Food Product	Frequency
<i>dodol</i>	87
<i>cencaluk</i>	67
<i>belacan</i>	46
<i>kuih keria</i> and <i>kerepek</i>	25
<i>gula Melaka</i> /palm sugar	11
<i>asam pedas</i> paste	9
<i>sagon</i>	6
<i>jeruk</i> and <i>keropok</i>	5
popcorn and <i>sagu</i>	2
<i>lempeng</i> , <i>udang kering</i> , <i>wajik</i> , <i>cakar ayam</i> , <i>pisang salai</i> , <i>inang-inang</i> , <i>kuih benderam</i> and <i>tapai</i>	1

Source: Field Work

Conclusion

Melaka is an attractive food tourism destination for both domestic and international tourists. Melaka offers various local food from different ethnic groups, namely Malay, Chinese, Indian Baba-Nyonya, and Portuguese. Melaka has potential as a food tourism spot due to its solid

tourism foundation and offers existing tourism spots reflecting Melaka's historical and cultural heritage. Modern tourism product is currently developed and promoted widely to attract younger generation tourists since 75% of respondents are aged under 40, as shown in this study. Introducing food as a tourism product may attract younger tourists as they may be less interested in history and cultural heritage. The latest concept of dining places that suit the younger generation lifestyle should be improved, such as food truck concept, pop-up concept, casual, innovative, and attractive environment.

This study also proves that most domestic tourists are Malay Muslim ethnic with a strict diet of halal food. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive directory of food information, including halal food for Muslim tourist. This directory should be accessible and widely promoted via social media and website by the government, individuals, and organisations directly or indirectly involved in the tourism sector. This directory will benefit both domestic Muslim and international Muslim tourist who visited Melaka.

Competing interest

No competing interest.

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