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## The Role Of Grilled Mutton Chunk (Taas) In Shaping Tourist's Perception And Culinary Culture Of Chitwan District

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the complex realm of gastronomical tourism through an examination of a traditional dish called "Taas," or grilled mutton chunk, and how it influences visitors' opinions of Chitwan, Nepal. The culinary appeal of Taas is still an underappreciated aspect of Chitwan's attractiveness, despite its lush surroundings, abundant species, rich biodiversity and cultural legacy.

The goal of this research is to identify the complex relationships that exist between flavour, cultural authenticity, and overall tourist satisfaction. Through an analysis of the sensory sensations linked to Taas eating, the study sheds light on the nuanced but significant connections between cuisine, cultural identity, historical preservation, and tourism economics.

The study's conclusions have practical ramifications for nearby companies, decision-makers, and tourism stakeholders in addition to enhancing the academic conversation on culinary tourism. Gaining insight into how Taas shapes visitors' opinions is essential for strategically promoting Chitwan's culinary legacy. It also promotes a greater understanding of the complex interrelationships that exist between food, culture, and tourism, highlighting the necessity of sustainable measures that protect culinary customs while improving the general guest experience.

**Keywords:** Chitwan, Gastronomy, Nepal, Taas, Tourism

### INTRODUCTION

As competition between tourism destinations heats up, local culture is becoming an increasingly valuable source of new products and activities to attract and entertain travelers. Since food is a fundamental component of the travel experience, gastronomy is especially significant.

Food tourism has gathered increased attention due to its multifaceted contributions to the socio-cultural and environmental aspects of tourism. The perspectives derived from tourism studies and food tourism research have significantly benefited from this focus on tourists. To grasp food tourism experiences fully, one must closely associate them with the local foodscape. This is pivotal because these experiences primarily encapsulate the essence of local surroundings, communities, and their narratives through the lens of foodscape. (Park, Muangasame, & Kim, 2021).

The concept of foodscape refers to a dynamic social construct that interconnects food with specific locations, individuals, and associated meanings. Notably, the foodscape remains fluid, constantly evolving in parallel with food preferences, dining habits, and other factors that shape our relationship with food (Johnston & Baumann, 2010).

Food tourism plays a role in shaping the local foodscape, exerting influence over the gastronomic culture and environment by becoming a significant tourism asset (Carvalho, Kastenholz, & Carneiro, 2017).

In the present era, people have transformed how they travel, actively pursuing a range of culinary adventures. As a result, food tourism has emerged as a separate sector within the larger tourism industry promoting cultural awareness. Within this sphere, food holds considerable economic importance for local communities in different

places. (Kunwar, 2017)

Chitwan is located in the central region of Nepal and offers enormous prospects for domestic tourism. Wildlife tourism is the current tourism development approach in Chitwan, but other complementary projects like hiking, bird watching, alone time spent wandering around ponds and lakes, forts and culture, community display, agro-tourism type, sport tourism type, and religious type tourism are also important in reducing overall poverty through the creation of income and employment generating activities in the key sectors. (Poudel, 2009).

Gobinda Tiwari introduced *Taas* to Chitwan in 1987 from his Bhetghat Restaurant, and from that point on, its popularity soared, becoming an integral part of Chitwan's culinary identity. Today, *Taas* has become inseparable from the essence of Chitwan. In the past, it was served at upscale restaurants both inside and outside of Nepal, but these days, medium-sized restaurants in the country's towns cook it, and even small-scale restaurants in Chitwan sell it as well. (Regmi, 2015).

*Taas* is a popular as grilled meat dish. *Taas* grilling is an act to grill a small piece of meat; vegetables etc., slowly in low flame. It is claimed to be a common method of continental cookery. In *Taas* very small tender pieces of meat (generally goat meat) with spices (ginger, garlic shreds) with oil in large griddle or shallow utensil are cooked under constant low heat stirring to dryness. The spices are cooked to slight burnt condition.

*Taas* is not only a delicious dish, but also a symbol of hospitality, generosity, and identity of Chitwan. *Taas* also showcases the natural resources and agricultural products of Chitwan, such as rice, mustard, ginger, garlic, and chilli.

Grilling's origins date to the 17th century, evident in the practices of the Arawak tribe in the Caribbean and South America. The Arawak utilized sticks to produce flames over a fire and cooked meat on them, a method they termed Barbacoa. This approach was embraced by Spanish conquerors, who refined it. By the 18th century, inhabitants in southeastern America adopted the technique, roasting pigs for extended periods over fires. Diverse sauces and types of wood were employed to impart distinct flavors to the meat. (Moss, 2010)

The foundation of grilling is the Maillard Reaction, a chemical reaction that occurs when heat from a grill breaks down proteins in food into amino acids. Following their reaction with the food's carbohydrates, these amino acids transform into this brown mass of delectable delight. (www.napoleon.com, 2023)

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to study about the *Taas* and tourism in Chitwan. The objectives of the research are as follows: -

- To evaluate the role of *Taas* in shaping culinary culture of Chitwan.
- To analyze the perception of tourists towards *Taas*.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Culinary tourism is the focus on food as an attraction for exploration and a destination for tourism. Even while providing food to visitors has always been an element of hospitality services, the tourism sector did not start emphasizing it until the late 1990s. Culinary trails, cooking lessons, restaurants, farm weekends, cookbooks, food guides, and new or modified recipes, dishes, and even ingredients are just a few of the many formats and products that are now part of it. While the majority of culinary tourism is centered around the dining and tasting experiences of new foods as a business venture, it is also an educational initiative that uses food curiosity to teach visitors about the culture of a particular cuisine, the people who produce and prepare it, the food system that makes those foods accessible, and the potential role that tourists can play in sustainability. Long, L. M. (Ed.). (2004), Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Lucy Long (2004) argues that a culinary tourist stands apart from conventional leisure travelers because they aren't required to travel abroad or even step out of their home. This distinction arises from the idea that culinary exploration extends beyond merely consuming food; it involves delving into various facets of the food system. Hence, a culinary tourist might encompass individuals who engage in activities such as watching cooking shows or reading culinary literature, allowing them to embark on mental voyages to different culinary realms.

Mr. Ujjwal Satyal, a Food & Beverage Expert and former principal at NATHM, emphasized the importance of showcasing Nepalese menus on the global stage through Nepalese embassies and consulates across different nations. Additionally, he urged Nepalese organizations abroad to exhibit Nepalese menus during festivals and events to introduce them to the foreign community.

A more ethical and sustainable tourist industry that benefits locals and visitors alike is fostered by food tourism. There are obstacles for culinary tourism, though it is critical for travelers to make thoughtful decisions about the causes they want to support and to align their actions with moral and ethical principles. Examples of this include abstaining from actions that endanger the environment or involve the abuse of animals. (Cohen & Avieli, 2004)

Nepal has a diverse array of cuisines that caters to tourists, spanning from worldwide foods such as continental and Asian dishes to local favourites like momos and dal bhat. There is no better way to understand Nepal and the Nepali people, than through their kitchen. Thakali and Newari foods reflect true Nepali flavour. (Nepal Tour Advisor, 2021)

The Annapurna Express writes the article with the heading “*Taas*, meaty delight of Chitwan” that, when you think of ‘*Taas*’, you think of Chitwan. This well-liked mutton dish comprises marinated mutton pieces cooked on a griddle using ample mustard oil. The meat cooked thus becomes tender, succulent, and rich in flavors. This iconic dish is perhaps an identity of Chitwan.

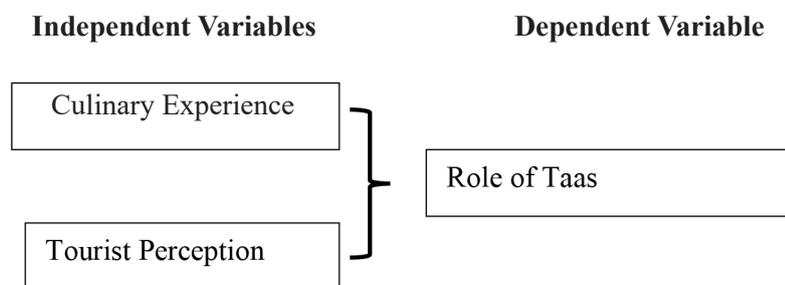
*Taas*, a strongly spiced fried goat meat dish that is typically served with *Bhuja* or *Chewra* (Puffed Rice) is one of Chitwan’s most famous dishes. Additionally, Momos are quite well-liked in the area. Notably well-known Newar food is offered in restaurants around Nepal, but particularly in Bhaktapur. Meat and dairy items are consumed in large quantities in this area, and fermented foods and drinks are easily found. (Thomas Cook, 2016)

The rich cultural and geographical diversity of the country allows for a broad spectrum of cuisines influenced by factors such as soil type, climate, and ethnicity. In *Taas*, small and tender meat chunks, frequently goat meat, are slowly cooked over low heat in a large griddle or shallow pan. The cooking process involves continuous stirring until the meat becomes dry, combined with the infusion of spices, along with the addition of oil. The spices are roasted until they reach a slightly charred aroma. (Regmi, 2015).

Most tourists from all over the world are drawn to food because it is a tangible component of traditional and cultural representation. One of the most important factors to consider while choosing a vacation is food. The customs and traditions of the dwelling community are profoundly described by the food. Native materials, preparation techniques, and presentation styles are the foundation of many regional cuisines that draw tourists from other countries. Food is not just a way to make money in certain countries; it’s also a calculated move to protect and grow their tourism sector. (Rochefoucauld 2011).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



### Independent Variables

**Culinary Experience:** A culinary experience involves an immersion or exploration centered on food, emphasizing the preparation, enjoyment, and understanding of various culinary styles and delicious offerings. This encompasses discovering a taste and flavor, ingredients, portion size, cooking methods, ambience, presentation and cultural elements associated with food.

**Tourist Perception:** Tourist perception involves the opinions of tourist for the dish *Taas* and their activities in Chitwan. Tourist perception refers to how travelers perceive and interpret the various aspects of a destination, including its attractions, culture, people, safety, cleanliness, infrastructure, and overall travel experience. It’s a subjective evaluation based on individual experiences, expectations, attitudes, and cultural backgrounds.

### Dependent Variable

**Role of *Taas*:** Role of *Taas* (Grilled Mutton Chunks) involves the contribution that are provided by *Taas* which is popular grilled goat meat dish in Nepal, particularly popular in districts of the central region.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This article is an exploratory research study that focuses on survey design. The opinion survey technique is used for primary data collection. Appropriate tools and techniques for the study are used. Various statistical tools are also used for research purposes. The study has tabulated and analyzed the collected data with SPSS16 software and mostly used descriptive and analytical tools.

Among the high number of restaurants and hotels, 17 representative restaurants were taken and data from those restaurants were collected which in overall gives the figure of tourist and customers perception with *Taas* and its contributions on tourism in the Chitwan. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 119 guests out of which 100 responses were collected.

At the reliability testing of the variable 'Role of *Taas*', the cronbach's alpha for 10 number of questionnaire is 0.613.

At the reliability testing of the variable 'Culinary Experience', the cronbach's alpha for 8 number of questionnaire is 0.638.

At the reliability testing of the variable 'Tourist's Perception', the cronbach's alpha for 9 number of questionnaire is 0.623.

The survey schedule had 33 items. Of these, 10 items were designed to obtain information regarding their demographic and job related features such as age, gender, etc. The other information related with research objectives were measure through multiple items on a five-point Likert scale having 1 as Strongly Agree and 5 as Strongly Disagree. The technique such as frequencies, descriptive analysis i.e. measures of central tendency (mean) and measures of variability (standard deviation) and correlation were used for the analysis of data.

## RESULT AND FINDINGS

The primary aims of this research were twofold: first, to ascertain the impact of *Taas* on shaping tourists' perception of Chitwan, and second, to understand the culinary experience among tourists visiting this region.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic Characteristics	N	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
19-30	35	35 %
31-45	29	29 %
46-60	23	23 %
Above 60	13	13 %
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	79	79 %
Female	21	21 %
<b>Level of Income (Annually in NPR)</b>		
Upto 500,000	19	19 %
Over 500,000 to 700,000	31	31 %
Over 700,000 to 1,000,000	27	27 %
Above 1,000,000	23	23 %

## Descriptive statistics of Role of *Taas* on Chitwan's Tourism

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Role of *Taas* on Chitwan's Tourism**

S.N.		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	<i>Taas</i> represents the unique cultural heritage of Chitwan district.	100	1.65	.606
2	<i>Taas</i> helps in increasing awareness about tourism in Chitwan district	100	1.65	.493
3	<i>Taas</i> helps to encourage travelers to visit Chitwan district.	100	1.59	.507
4	<i>Taas</i> contributes to the visibility of Chitwan districts natural beauty, wildlife, and adventure opportunities.	100	1.76	.562
5	<i>Taas</i> utilizes social media platforms to reach a broader audience.	100	1.41	.507
6	<i>Taas</i> helps to build positive relationships between tourism stakeholders.	100	1.59	.507
7	<i>Taas</i> has a positive impact on boosting the local economy.	100	1.35	.493
8	<i>Taas</i> helps in improving the Chitwan district image as a safe and welcoming destination.	100	1.71	.470
9	<i>Taas</i> contributes to the preservation of Chitwan district environment by promoting responsible tourism practices.	100	1.59	.507
10	<i>Taas</i> engages with tourists for feedback and suggestions which helps Chitwan district for improving tourism offerings.	100	1.65	.493
	Valid N (listwise)	100		

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of individual statement related with Role of *Taas* on Chitwan's Tourism. In the above table, seventh statement, "*Taas* has a positive impact on boosting the local economy." has the lowest mean i.e. 1.35, so that this is the most agreed statements. As well as the fourth statement, "*Taas* contributes to the visibility of Chitwan districts natural beauty, wildlife, and adventure opportunities" has highest mean i.e. 1.76, since it is less than 3 we can say it as the agreed statement but among all response it is the most disagreed statement.

Standard deviation of first statement, "*Taas* represents the unique cultural heritage of Chitwan district", is highest i.e. 0.606 so that this is much spread out from mean.

## Descriptive statistics of Culinary Culture of *Taas*

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Culinary Culture with *Taas* and tourism in Chitwan**

S.N.		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The taste and flavor of the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) exceeded my expectations.	100	1.76	.562
2	I am satisfied with the quality of service I received during my ( <i>Taas</i> ) dining experience.	100	2.06	.748
3	The ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience positively contributed to my overall perception of Chitwan as a tourist destination.	100	1.82	.883
4	I am satisfied with the portion size of the ( <i>Taas</i> ) served to me. (Approx 400 gm per portion)	100	1.71	.470
5	The ambiance and atmosphere of the dining establishment positively enhanced my ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience.	100	2.41	.507
6	The presentation, plating and visual appeal of the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) dish were impressive.	100	3.06	.748
7	The variety and options available for grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) in different dining establishments in Chitwan are satisfactory.	100	2.29	.470
8	The pricing of the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) is reasonable considering the value provided.	100	2.35	.493
	Valid N (listwise)	100		

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of individual statement related with the culinary experience on *Taas* and

tourism in Chitwan. In the table, fourth statement, “I am satisfied with the portion size (approx. 400 gm) of the (*Taas*) served to me” has the lowest mean i.e. 1.71, so that this is the most agreed statement. As well as the fifth statement, “The ambiance and atmosphere of the dining establishment positively enhanced my (*Taas*) experience” has highest mean i.e. 2.41, which means this is most disagreed statement.

Standard deviation of third statement, “The (*Taas*) experience positively contributed to my overall perception of Chitwan as a tourist destination”, is highest i.e. 0.883 so that it is much spread out from mean.

**Descriptive statistics of Tourist perception**

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Tourist perception on *Taas* and tourism in Chitwan**

S.N.		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience enhanced my perception of Chitwan’s cultural authenticity.	100	1.76	.562
2	I believe that the consumption of grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) increases the understanding of Chitwan’s local cuisine.	100	2.06	.748
3	The grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience contributed to the good image of Chitwan as a tourist destination.	100	1.82	.883
4	The availability of grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) as a culinary option added value to my perception of Chitwan district.	100	1.71	.470
5	I felt that the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience increases my connection to the local traditions in Chitwan.	100	2.41	.507
6	I believe that the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience represents the rich culinary heritage of Chitwan.	100	3.06	.748
7	The grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience represents the importance of local food in shaping Chitwan’s identity.	100	2.29	.470
8	I felt that the grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) experience added authenticity to my overall Chitwan visit.	100	2.35	.493
9	The presence of grilled mutton chunks ( <i>Taas</i> ) in Chitwan’s culinary offerings made me view the destination as distinct.	100	1.29	.470
	Valid N (listwise)	100		

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of Tourist perception on *Taas* and tourism in Chitwan. In the table, ninth statement, “The presence of grilled mutton chunks (*Taas*) in Chitwan’s culinary offerings made me view the destination as distinct” has lowest mean i.e. 1.29, so that this so that this is the most agreed statement. As well as the sixth statement, “I believe that the grilled mutton chunks (*Taas*) experience showcased the rich culinary heritage of Chitwan” has highest mean i.e. 3.06, which means this is most disagreed statement.

Standard deviation of third statement, “The grilled mutton chunks (*Taas*) experience contributed to the good image of Chitwan as a tourist destination”, is highest i.e. 0.883, so that it is much spread out from mean.

**Correlation between variables**

**Table 5: Correlations between Role of *Taas* with Culinary Experience and Tourist’s perception**

		Role of <i>Taas</i>	Culinary Experience	Tourist Perception
Role of <i>Taas</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.632*	.498*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.036	.042
	N	100	100	100

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 show correlations between three variables: Role of *Taas* with Culinary Experience and Tourist’s perception. Here is the breakdown of correlations:

Role of *Taas*: Pearson Correlation: This is the correlation coefficient between Role of *Taas* and itself, which is always 1 since it represents the correlation of a variable with itself.

Culinary Experience: Pearson Correlation: The correlation coefficient between Role of *Taas* and Culinary Experience is 0.632\*. This indicates a positive correlation, suggesting that as Role of *Taas* increases, Culinary Experience of tourists tends to increase as well, and vice versa.

Sig. (2-tailed): The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient is 0.036. This value indicates that the correlation between Role of *Taas* and Culinary Experience is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

Tourist Perception: Pearson Correlation: The correlation coefficient between Role of *Taas* and Tourist Perception is 0.498\*. This also represents a 49.8% positive correlation, indicating that as Role of *Taas* increases, tourist perception towards *Taas* tends to increase as well, and vice versa.

Sig. (2-tailed): The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient is 0.042. This value indicates that the correlation between Role of *Taas* and Tourist Perception is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

## CONCLUSION

The sample size for the study is 100 number of respondent from various representative *Taas* selling restaurant of Chitwan district. The result of this sample's response served as a foundation for analyzing the relationship between dependent variable i.e. culinary experience and tourist's perception, and independent variables i.e. Role of *Taas* in promoting tourism of Chitwan.

Through comprehensive data analysis and presentation, it becomes evident that in any travel expedition, cuisine functions as a universal language that fluently communicates a destination's cultural essence and legacy. It exceeds ordinary nourishment; rather, it constitutes a vital aspect of the travel journey. When visitors partake in local food, they embark on a flavorful journey that intimately connects them with the essence of a place. Each dish narrates a unique tale, mirroring the customs, historical roots, and inventive spirit of the indigenous population. This gastronomic exploration forges a bond between travelers and the local community, nurturing mutual comprehension and admiration.

Furthermore, it contributes to the local economy by boosting the livelihoods of farmers, markets, and small-scale enterprises. By relishing regional delicacies, travelers actively engage in preserving culinary heritage and fostering cultural multiplicity. Ultimately, food in the realm of tourism transcends its basic function as a meal; it serves as a jubilation of identity, shared experiences, and the diverse variety of human existence.

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