*Research Paper*

# Challenges in Offering Street Food Experiences for Tourists in Sri Lanka; Insights from Tourism Stakeholders

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## Abstract

Street food is a vital component of the tourism industry. It offers authentic food experiences and cultural engagements with the host community. Thus, Street food has the potential to create favorable impacts on a destination. However, this sector encounters challenges in offering quality experiences for tourists. Hence, this study aimed to explore the Challenges for Tourists' Street Food Experiences in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the qualitative design was employed in this study. The research utilized the purposive sampling method and conducted twenty-seven structured interviews with Street food Vendors, Government officials, and foreign tourists. Data were collected from Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Jaffna, and Trincomalee. In addition, data was analyzed using content analysis. Thus, hygiene, issues, food quality issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, lack of infrastructure facilities, and lack of food availability were identified as the challenges to tourists' experiences in Sri Lanka. This research recommends arranging training programs for street food vendors. Collaborations between government and tourism organizations, developing a website or smartphone application, creating online advertising initiatives, and encouraging vendors to differ their traditional menus. The findings of this study may benefit government officials and tourism organizations in developing training programs and making policies. Moreover, the findings contribute to the existing knowledge of challenges in the Street food Experience and assist undergraduate and postgraduate students in completing their final theses.

*Keywords*: Challenges, Street Food, Tourist Experiences, Tourism Stakeholders

## 1. Introduction

Food is one of the main needs of life. Nutrients are compounds necessary for the growth, repair, and maintenance of the human body, as well as the regulation of vital activities. Food plays a vital role in means of social, cultural, economic, and political interaction. Hence, food is not regarded as a basic need for tourists anymore. Thus, Tourists experience local food and beverages, which could enhance their tour experience and awareness. Hence, food is considered as the third largest factor in deciding a vacation destination (Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2019). Accordingly, Tsai and Wang (2017) mentioned that tourists generally spend approximately 40% of their total spending on meals while on vacation. In this light, Kivela and Crotts (2006) noted that tourists who are interested in culinary activities and food hunting are solely interested in the cuisines and food culture of a place while choosing a vacation spot. Hence, culinary tourism is now evolving fast and becoming one of the most innovative, and destination managers and corporations in the tourist sector are starting to appreciate the value of food as a diverse component of tourism (Resmi, Dhewanto, & Dellyana, 2023). Moreover, An, Choi, Eck, and Yim (2023) suggest that food promotes social bonds among tourists and the host community. Further, food allows tourists to explore other cultures. As a result, food is considered as most valuable cultural asset of many countries, reflecting both regional and national identity. food consumption permits tourists to get authentic dining experiences outside of their regular environment by expressing local traditions, culture, and history via cuisine. Food has a significant impact on travelers' vacation experiences (An et al., 2023; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Moreover, Konttinen, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, Silventoinen, Männistö, and Haukkala (2013) mentioned that taste, health, price, and the ease of buying and cooking food are the most significant food choice motivations among people. Compared to more educated and wealthier people, low-income persons prioritize price the most. Further, Cruwys, Bevelander, and Hermans (2015) state that every person's social identity is influenced by their diet. Accordingly, religion or race, social and economic variables, motivation, past eating experience, food-related personality characteristics, and other psychological aspects all impact how people choose food.

In this sense, Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) mention that Street food is a method to tourists to engage with the host society. Since it aids in to understanding the native lifestyle, as well as a deeper and more varied culinary experience. In addition, they mention that is much more comfortable to dine on the street compared to a restaurant. Since food is typically less expensive and, in some cases, higher quality than more structured food options in restaurants. Further, street foods aid in the attainment of deeper, more significant, memorable, and genuine holidays and experiences. Furthermore, street food vending is available 24 hours a day and comes in a broad variety of local flavors. Toh and Birchenough (2000) mention that street food is seen as socially and economically significant in certain parts of the world. Thus, street food is an important industry that provides significant revenue to low-income people in many nations. Additionally, Kururatchaikul (2014) mentioned that street foods are often prepared with fresh ingredients acquired from local shops, and the ingredients vary from vendor to vendor. Hence, these unique features of street foods serve as a motivation for tourists to visit particular destinations. Privitera and Nesci (2015) mention that some street food dishes which are popular in many regions of the world and have begun to be viewed as tourist destinations for certain unique dishes. For Instance, the hot dogs of New York, the kebab of Istanbul, the panelle of Palermo, the sauerkraut of Germany, and the samosa of India. Further, Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) noted that street foods are popular in countries such as the United States, Mexico, Morocco, Brazil, Italy, Turkey, India, Singapore, Thailand, China, and Japan and these countries receive a large volume of tourist traffic due to the culinary tourism industry.

The above-mentioned unique qualities of street food have a wide range of beneficial effects on tourism. However, this sector encounters several hurdles that must be solved for the street food business to thrive in the future as a tourist product. Accordingly, Thanh (2015); Trafialek et al. (2018) noted that street foods have been recognized as a significant contributor to the rising incidence of food-borne disease outbreaks, particularly in developing countries in recent years. Numerous documented cases highlight the potential public health risks associated with this sector In addition, Carol and Ongori (2013) mentioned that city planners and policymakers create policies to govern the operation of the street food sector, However, the majority of these laws and policies have adverse effects on street food vendors. Further, Henderson (2019) identified that strong rivalry among street food vendors as a barrier in offering quality street food experiences for tourists. Moreover, Khairuzzaman, Chowdhury, Zaman, Al Mamun, and Bari (2014) stated that poor transportation techniques and storage of ingredients and food materials are act as constrains in the street food industry

Accordingly, Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) noted that Sri Lanka is a renowned travel destination in the world due to a wide range of features that are different from other countries in the world. Further, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) mentioned that traditional cuisines, seasonality food items, and the vibrant food cultures that are associated with ethnicities and different areas of the country act as motivations for tourists from different parts of the world to visit Sri Lanka. However, Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) mentioned that the culinary tourism potential is still underutilized. In this light, World Health Organization (WHO) (2012) noted that street food consumption is unpopular in Sri Lankan context and the Street Food market offers a narrow selection of prepared food items. Further, Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) mentioned that street food vending in Sri Lanka comprises the informal sector and their commercial operations are unpredictable, irregular, and have a small economic importance. However, Devaraja (2013) noted that street food vending has been operated for a long time in Sri Lanka. Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020)  mentioned that Sri Lanka has a small street food sector in comparison to other South Asian countries where street food is popular among tourists. Further, they mention that street food is a vital component in marketing Sri Lanka as a tourist destination. In this light, Devaraja (2013); Lokeshwara, Lakshitha, and Chathuranga (2023); Perera, Nawarathne, and Kulatunga (2018) state that with the recent popularity of Sri Lankan Street food as an easy and affordable option to satisfy hunger, a growing number of tourists have begun to pay attention to Sri Lankan Street foods. Presently, Sri Lankan Street foods are inspirational to international tourists. Due to its popularity, street food has recently developed as a tourism product in Sri Lanka.

In this light, scholars such as Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017); Cohen and Avieli (2004); Henderson (2019); Park et al. (2019); Privitera and Nesci (2015) have made several efforts to assess the street food consumption of tourists in different areas in the world context. Further,   Devaraja (2013); Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003); Lokeshwara et al. (2023); Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020); Perera et al. (2018) have conducted research studies on street food and its relationship with the tourism industry in the Sri Lankan Context. However, despite the rising popularity of Street Foods as a tourism product, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that have been conducted on the challenges of Offering Street Food Experiences for Tourists. Thus, understanding these challenges is essential in enhancing the quality of Street food experiences. Hence, it is critical to conduct a study on the challenges of street food experiences for tourists. Thus, this study aims to explore the Challenges for Tourists' Street Food Experiences with the evidence of Sri Lanka.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Food Tourism

Food has been acknowledged as a tourist attraction that boosts the importance of a particular destination. Hence, Okumus (2021) describes tourism motivated by food or linked to food, such as food tourism, gastronomic tourism, gourmet tourism, and culinary tourism. Further, Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, and Cambourne (2004) mentioned that food tourism is visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations for which food tasting or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel. Moreover, Long (2005) defined food tourism is concerned with food as a concept as well as a method, destination, and tool for tourism. Thus, Smith and Xiao (2008) suggested a wide classification that includes food tourism resources. Accordingly, the classification comprised four categories such as facilities, activities, Events, and Organizations. In addition, Berno, Laurin, and Maltezakis (2014) noted that Food is a form of intangible cultural property since it is infused with both social and cultural wealth. Hence, Fusté-Forné and Berno (2016) mentioned that Food tourism aids tourists in learning about the culture and traditions of a destination in a more genuine, meaningful, and interactive way. In this sense, Ardabili, Rasouli, Daryani, Molaie, and Sharegi (2011) mentioned that tourists interested in different cultures, and experiencing the culinary habits of different nations may be an approach to learning about economic, social, cultural, and religious elements of the host community. Accordingly, Tourists enjoy tasting popular cuisines from across the globe that are distinctive to different nations and ethnic communities. Thus, Lertputtarak (2012); Privitera and Nesci (2015) mentioned that that the softest and tastiest green mussels of New Zealand, delectable lobster meals in Maine, and green tea combined food and drinks in Japan are examples of a few of the most well-known unique cuisines that attract tourists around the world. Hence, at present, food tourism has become one of the most prominent areas in the tourism industry with increased willingness and awareness among tourists.

### 2.2. Street Food Vending

The street vending industry is primarily a large one and it originates in the informal sector. Street vending includes the sale of beauty products, fruits, vegetables and used clothing in public places. In this light, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2012) define Street food as ready-to-eat foods and beverages that are prepared and/or sold by itinerant or stationary vendors, especially on streets and in other public places. Moreover, Kowalczyk (2014) defines street foods as "fast food" or "finger food", and mentions that street foods are often less expensive than dishes from restaurants and other food service establishments. Moreover, Privitera and Nesci (2015) describe street foods as "vertical foods" as almost all street foods are eaten while standing. Further, they mentioned that street Food Establishments offer a very limited number of chairs and seats to their customers to encourage standing consumption and takeaways. Calloni (2013) suggested that street food has existed since the Middle Ages and its reputation began to degrade with the introduction of restaurants in the eighteenth century as the wealthy class people abandoned street food in favor of table service at restaurants to improve their image. Then, street food became the meal of the poor. Furthermore, street foods regained their popularity after the industrial revolution of Europe in the nineteenth century lower paid employees hadn't time to prepare meals at home. However, İrigüler and Öztürk (2016) noted that traditionally, street food was sold by vendors traveling around a city, and street foods are sold on movable food carts which are redesigned using automobiles, bicycles, and motorcycles at the present. Particularly, redesigned automobiles known as "food trucks, and are becoming

increasingly popular in the street food sector. Further, Ukenna and Ayodele (2019) mentioned that street food vendors can be seen as, selling goods from pushcarts, baskets, balancing poles, kiosks, or stores with less than four solid walls. In this light, Henderson (2019) that street food as an outstanding food service style that may fulfill tourists' needs for nourishment at a reasonable price. In addition, street food is an attraction for tourists. Since the sight of sellers at work may enhance the attractiveness of places

### 2.3. Challenges for Street Food Experiences

Previous scholars have identified challenges related to street food experiences. Accordingly, Carol and Ongori (2013) mentioned that city planners make policies and regulations unfavorable to street vendors. For instance, they conduct frequent inspections and demolitions, confiscate items, and occasionally relocate street vendors from locations where they exist. Hence this restrictive bureaucratic regulation has been one of the major challenges that affect street food vending on offering street food experiences. Apart from that, Mukhola (2014) mentioned that the Landlords of the spaces, where street food vendors operate their enterprises constantly threatened to evict street food establishments. Thus, landlords engage in unfair behavior such as raising rent for spaces despite the absence of amenities required for street food vending. Moreover, Habib (2016); Jose and Villanueva (2023) mentioned that Food safety awareness of street food vendors is still a major concern in both developed and developing countries. Particularly at risk of physical, chemical, and biological contamination, street food selling brings major risks to food safety and preparation standards. Moreover, Khairuzzaman et al. (2014) states that poor waste disposal systems is a challenge for street food vending causing an increase of garbage at street food vending locations and risk of food contamination. Moreover, Khairuzzaman et al. (2014); Kirchner, Goulter, Chapman, Clayton, and Jaykus (2021) mention that street foods may include nonfood grade chemical substances such as colorants and preservatives, as well as contaminants such as pesticide residue and textile dyes. Further, they mention that street food vendors use low-quality ingredients with unpermitted chemical additions obtained from unauthorized suppliers to keep costs low. Furthermore, vendors use chemicals such as colorants to hide the low quality of low-quality ingredients. Hence. those challenges have adverse impacts on street food experiences. Moreover, Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) identified credit basis selling, difficulties in utilizing the public transport, price fluctuations, limited options for saving money, and lack of institutional support as the challenges for street food vending in Sri Lanka. Further, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) emphasized that there was a shortage of initiatives involving relevant parties of Street foods in decision-making. In addition, Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) stated that food diversity in Sri Lanka was underutilized for street foods.

## 3. Conceptual Indicator Model

The concept indicator model explains the methodology of research in visual and textual formats to aid the reader in understanding the research strategy. Thus, the concept indicator model of this study is illustrated as follows



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Indicator Model

Source. Developed by the researchers (2024)

## 4. Methodology

This research study followed the qualitative design. Thus, this study considers all direct stakeholders in street food vending as the population to achieve the objective of this study. Accordingly, Guarte and Barrios (2006) noted that purposive sampling aids researchers in selecting participants who could offer rich and diverse perspectives relevant to the research questions. Thus, Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Jaffna, and Trincomalee areas were identified as the areas for data collection due to many reasons such as the diversity of street food consumers, the nature of the operating environment, and the potential to promote Street food tourism. Moreover, Holloway and Galvin (2023) mentioned that structured interviews are that it is time-efficient, restrict interviewer subjectivity and bias, and the interviewer manages the interview topics and format, making it easier to code, compare, and interpret data. Hence, researchers collected primary data via structured interviews with foreign tourists, street food vendors, and government officials ( Officers from tourism Ministries and Public Health Inspectors) selected via purposive sampling method. Particularly, the researcher conducted physical face-to-face interviews with the street food vendors who had vending stalls and tourists at the street food vending locations. In addition, the researcher had to conduct some physical face-to-face interviews and some Online Zoom meetings due to the availability issues of the government officials. Thus, 27 participants were interviewed as the sample size. The selection of this sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation. The duration of each interview ranged from 20-30 minutes. After each interview, it was documented and re-examined by the researcher. Each transcript was submitted to the relevant respondent to validate the data collected. In addition, the researcher shared the interview transcripts, methodology and final report with the impartial peers to enhance the reliability and ensure the validity.   Thus, revised transcripts were analyzed via content analysis. Stemler (2015) mentioned that content analysis is the most often used data analysis method for qualitative data analysis to discover patterns of relevance throughout a data set and aid in identifying relevant patterns in the data that will provide a solution to the particular study issue. Hence, content analysis was employed to analyze the data of this research.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Street food is a vital component of Food Tourism. Meanwhile fulfilling the hunger of the tourists, it offers a vast array of local flavors and represents the local cultures.. These dynamic food experiences offer economical, quick dining alternatives and represent the local heritage and traditions. Behind the importance of Street food as a tourism product, it encounters many challenges in offering quality food experiences for tourists. Hence, this study identified six challenges for tourists' street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Thus, food hygiene issues, food quality issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, Inadequate infrastructure facilities, and lack of food choices were the challenges to Tourists' Street Food Experiences in Sri Lanka.

Thus, hygiene issues are the first category identified under the challenges of street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Therefore, street food vending may cause several hygienic issues that endanger the safety of consumers. These issues frequently emerge as a result of the informal nature of street food vending in Sri Lanka. In this light, interviews with participants revealed that many street food vendors in Sri Lanka operate without adhering to basic hygiene practices, including proper handwashing before food preparation, using clean equipment and surfaces for preparation and handling food items, covering hair, and wearing gloves. It creates direct contact with the food they offer to their customers. This practice raises concerns about hygiene and food safety. Further, researchers found that street food vendors cover and follow hygiene practices only in the presence of Public Health Inspectors (PHI). Moreover, respondents mentioned

the unsanitary conditions more prevalent in the environments where street food vendors operate, Particularly in food preparation areas and vending areas, and they do not operate in accordance with the food act of Sri Lanka. Moreover, the researcher questioned the sorts of wrappers used by street food vendors. Thus, respondents mentioned two broad categories. The first includes natural wrappers, such as leaves widely used by sellers selling things like boiled corn and pickles. However, the majority of food sellers use paper-based products, such as excise books, newspapers, brochures, paper plates, and brown paper bags. Thus, respondents stated that items such as excise books, newspapers, and brochures may represent possible foodborne concerns due to the presence of carbon in the printing materials. Therefore, this lack of hygiene practices of street food vendors causes food safety and increases the likelihood of foodborne illnesses such as Abdominal Pain, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Fever, Headaches, Fatigue, Weakness, Neurological problems, and Death among consumers. Further, participants noted that street food vending environments is often frequent by insects and mammals. Thus, this presence of animals causes food hygiene issues and disrupt tourists' dining experiences. In concurrence with the findings of this study, Habib (2016); Jose and Villanueva (2023) mentioned that street food vendors in developing countries are usually unaware and care little about food hygiene and safety and street vendors frequently work in unsuitable conditions for preparing and selling food.

> *"According to new regulations, there must be separate areas for food preparation, food storage, and even for changing clothes. They do not have additional space for that. They do everything in the same site"*

> (Public Health Inspector 03: Personal Communication, 2024)

Thus, Hygiene issues emerge as a critical concern in offering quality street food experiences for tourists in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the researcher identified that it occurs due to insufficient expertise and knowledge of food safety and hygiene of Street Food Vendors. They are making and vending street foods only as a stable career and to escape from poverty. Thus, in many regions in Sri Lanka, street food provides a risk of foodborne illness, particularly due to pathogenic organisms.

Moreover, the second category of challenges in the street food experience in Sri Lanka is the food quality issues. Thus, the participants in the interviews mentioned that the use of low-quality ingredients and harmful chemical substances is prevalent among street food vending in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, street food vendors often deviate from traditional recipes by using lower-quality ingredients. For instance, street food vendors frequently use wheat flour instead of using black gram powder which is traditionally used for preparing Ulundu Vadai and dosa. However, those products lack the authentic flavor and nutritional values associated with black gram. Further, street food vendors reuse discarded oil for frying fresh food items though it is not safe for human consumption. Further, PHIs mentioned that street food vendors tend to rely on instant food items such as Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) and artificial colorants in excessive amounts. Further, they emphasized that reusing discarded oils, use of MSG, and artificial colorants fail to impart natural colors and flavors. Conversely, it causes cancers. Accordingly, similar to the findings of this study, Khairuzzaman et al. (2014); Kirchner et al. (2021) note that street foods may include nonfood grade chemical substances such as colorants and preservatives, as well as contaminants such as pesticide residue and textile dyes.

> *"When considering Ulundu Vadai in Jaffna, it has the natural black gram flavor that is authentic and rich. However, we cannot expect the same flavor from Ulundu Vadai in Pettah. In fact, Pettah's version often doesn't resemble the*

*authentic dish, as it is made primarily with wheat flour rather than black gram. Vendors misleadingly label it as Ulundu Vadai. Hence, how can we promote products that fail to represent the true culinary heritage and taste for tourists?"*

(Tourism Promotion Officer 05: Personal Communication, 2024)

As a result, the researcher identified that street food vendors typically decrease the quality of the food products they serve owing to production costs. They believe that simply lowering the cost of the ingredients would help them to lower their production costs.

In addition, the third category of the constraints on street food experiences in Sri Lanka is the unfavorable regulatory framework on street food vending. Thus, the regulatory framework around street food vending in Sri Lanka causes issues in offering quality experiences for tourists. Accordingly, many of street food vendors operate without proper registration or formalization of their enterprises. Particularly, vendors hesitate to get the registrations as they perceive it as a burden for them. However, this lack of legal recognition restricts government officials from attempting to enforce regulatory standards and ensuring compliance with health and safety rules during a food safety issue. Furthermore, street food vendors encounter numerous policy changes whenever a power change happens in local government agencies as some political parties provide essential support whereas some political parties perceive street food vending as a burden. As a result, vendors often lose their established vending locations, leading to instability and uncertainty in their livelihoods. In addition, some government officials also perceive street food vending as a burden and believe that Street food vending distracts the daily operations of the urban areas and scenic beauty. More importantly, the researchers identified that street food vendors perceive the inspections done by PHIs as a threat to their operations. Thus, in agreement with the findings of this study, Carol and Ongori (2013); Parasecoli (2021) mentioned that in developing countries, city planners adopt policies to govern the informal sector, particularly street vending. However, the majority of these policies are unfriendly towards street vendors. For instance, frequent inspections and demolitions, confiscate products and occasionally transferring street traders from their current vending locations.

*"In Galle, many of street food vendors don't have permanent facilities for street food vending. We do not agree to provide them with permanent locations for street food vending. we believe that it ruins the beauty of the city"*

(Public Health Inspector 02: Personal Communication, 2024)

*"Street food vendors fear that local politicians may alter their vending locations from time to time as their authority shifts".*

(Development Officer 01: Personal Communication, 2024)

Further, collaboration issues were identified as the third category of the challenges in street food experiences in Sri Lanka. At the global level, Institutions such as World Bank and the global nongovernment organizations prefer to aid small and medium entrepreneurs such as street food vendors. However, the researchers identified a lack of collaboration among stakeholders in street food vending in Sri Lanka. Thus, Street food vendors encounter challenges in obtaining financial and non-financial support limiting their ability to invest in the infrastructure of the vending locations. Accordingly, not possessing proper registration from relevant authorities causes difficulties in obtaining financial support for street food vendors. Hence, banks and other institutions do not consider street food vendors for loans and other supporting shames as they are not willing to take financial risks. Further, the researcher identified that financial

literacy and navigating available opportunities among street food vendors cause collaboration issues. Moreover, the researcher identified there is a lack of coordination among the institutions that are relevant to street food vending. Especially, tourism-related national-level organizations and provincial-level organizations, and those organizations operate individually. Hence this unconnected approach creates many issues in regulatory processes and policymaking associated with street food selling, preventing efforts to improve and promote street food as a component of local culture. Accordingly, in concurring with the findings of this study, Ukenna and Ayodele (2019) mention that databases to facilitate street food vendors with financial assistance from governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions are insufficient. Further, Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) mention that street food vendors do not rely on any organizational assistance. Instead of that they rely on their knowledge and skills, with the assistance of a group of closest relatives and other partners

> *"Yes, when they want to obtain a loan, they must have a Business Registration. Because banks are not willing to take a risk. Without a Business Registration Banks are not going to finance them. Rarely I have seen that NGOs support street food vendors"*

> (Tourism Promotion Officer 02: Personal Communication, 2024)

> *"Umm… I started up my business with Rs.30,000.00. Those times there was nobody to help me either. I came so far only with my own effort. Now my business is quite stable. I have applied for a loan from the bank as I hope to expand my business"*

> (Street Food Vendor 01: Personal Communication, 2024)

Further, Khairuzzaman et al. (2014); Parasecoli (2021); Walsh (2010) mention that inadequate waste disposal methods as an issue for the street food industry as it causes garbage issues in street food vending areas. Consequently, the insect population has risen sharply and the risk of food contamination has grown in food vending areas. Moreover, Parasecoli (2021); Walsh (2010) noted that some governments have restricted street food vendors to specific areas and required them to pay for water, power, and other fees. However, there is a shortage of infrastructure facilities necessary for those street food vending areas. In this light, Inadequate infrastructure facilities were identified as the fourth category of the constraints on street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Thus, street food vending areas of Sri Lanka lack of basic infrastructure facilities, such as proper water facilities for handwashing, waste disposal systems, lighting, parking facilities, and sanitary facilities specifically allocated for street foods. Thus, it restricts vendors' ability to maintain hygiene standards and compromises the overall quality of street food experiences for tourists and other customers as they encounter issues when they require water facilities for drinking and hand washing during street food experiences. Furthermore, it causes garbage issues and overcrowding problems in street food vending areas. In addition, the lack of sanitary facilities for tourists and other customers leads to problems in street food vending areas. Apart from the limited facilities available in street food vending areas, researchers identified that the maintenance of limited available facilities is also poor due to issues in tender processes and poor cost-reduction strategies undertaken by the local governments.

> *"As I know there is no such facilities specifically allocated for street food vending in the Kandy area. Because the majority of vendors are operated in a temporary basis."*

<div align="right">(Development Officer 01: Personal Communication, 2024)</div>

The lack of food choices availability has been a vital challenge for tourists' street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Government officials and tourists mentioned that a limited array of food items available at Street food vending locations. Thus, different varieties of vadai, fried vegetable items (ie : Potato, Casava etc), samosa, cutlets, rolls, kottu, fried rice, noodles, ice cream, fruit juices, and different bun items are frequently served as street food items in Sri Lanka. Thus, this study reveals that economic considerations, culinary skills, and poor differentiation of products cause the lack of food choice availability. Thus, Street food vendors frequently operate on limited budgets. hence, they choose less costly, more easily accessible items to cut their expenses. Further, many street food vendors may lack the training or expertise to prepare a wide range of dishes. Conversely, street food vendors often sell similar products rather than experimenting with unique or less common dishes. Ultimately it results in a narrow menu available in vending stalls.   In addition to that, street food vendors have been unable to identify the prevailing trends and the dietary requirements of the tourists. Due to that tourists are struggling to find food solutions that match with their dietary requirements. Further, street food vendors have been unable to identify the current trends in the local customers as well. However, these issues can affect the overall street food experience and prevent the exploration of local cuisine further.

> *The only problem with the street food for us is that too spicy. Especially for our kids. Otherwise, we try it often"*

<div align="right">(Tourist 02: Personal Communication, 2024)</div>

> *"I am Indian and I am fully vegetarian. In our country, we have many food options in our street food stalls. But in Sri Lanka, we did not find full vegetable options"*

<div align="right">(Tourist 04: Personal Communication, 2024)</div>

In this light, Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003); Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020); Perera et al. (2018) mentioned that Sri Lanka has a vital and diversified food culture that has been underutilized even today. Hence, it limits the variety of food available in Street food markets.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the challenges on tourists' street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Thus, hygiene issues, food quality issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, Inadequate infrastructure facilities, and lack of food choices were the challenges of Street Food experiences in Sri Lanka. Hence, to overcome these challenges, training programs/ workshops for street food vendors need to be organized. These training programs/ workshops should address important topics such as customer service and dealing with tourist demands. In addition, Street food vendors in Sri Lanka must guarantee that their offerings constantly fulfill quality requirements. Hence, government organizations and tourism boards might work together to develop a system for inspecting Street Food Quality rather than inspections done independently of each other. Further, Street Food Vendors must be encouraged to differ their traditional menus by offering

additional options, such as ethnic foods and healthier food alternatives which are appealing to both foreign tourists and locals. Tourism boards should collaborate with vendors to create online advertising initiatives that highlight street food experiences on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. In addition, interacting with food bloggers, celebrities, social media influencers, and travel websites may help street food sellers gain greater publicity around the world. , developing a website or smartphone application that lists certified street food vendors, their prices, their menus, and their vending locations can increase the exposure for tourists. In addition, this digital platform must contain tourist reviews, and cleanliness ratings, and must facilitate ordering in advance or payments without cash, making the platform simpler for tourists to interact with street food vendors.

## 7. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have significant practical implications for the stakeholders of street food vending. Particularly for street food vendors, government authorities, and other destination management organizations. Accordingly, street food vendors in Sri Lanka may identify areas for future improvement. Government authorities may benefit from this study when developing training programs/ workshops for street food vendors. In addition, this study helps government authorities in the quality assurance and standardization of street foods in Sri Lanka. Further, this study offers information for policymakers in government organizations on the regulation and growth of the street food business in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge of challenges on Street food Experiences. In addition, this study will provide undergraduate and postgraduate students at public and private universities with clear assistance while completing their final theses.

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