

# Slow Food Tourism in Vietnam: Unlocking Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges

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## Abstract

This research explores the concept of Slow Food Tourism (SFT) and examines the opportunities and challenges for its development in Vietnam. Grounded in the principles of slow philosophy and sustainability, the SFT emphasizes the active participation of tourists, farmers, and local communities. Drawing on a review of existing literature and case studies, this study identifies Vietnam's rich culinary heritage and traditional agriculture as key assets for SFT development. However, significant challenges, such as limited infrastructure, insufficient policy support, and a lack of awareness and training among stakeholders, hinder their potential. The paper concludes with recommendations for leveraging Vietnam's unique strengths, while addressing these barriers to promoting SFT as a sustainable tourism model.

**Keywords:** slow food tourism, slow tourism, gastronomy tourism, agrotourism, sustainability

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism has evolved beyond traditional sightseeing, with travelers increasingly seeking deeper, more immersive cultural experiences [1]. Food tourism has emerged as a thriving global trend, with more people placing gastronomy at the heart of their travel plans. According to Airbnb's internal data on the most booked experience categories by international travelers in 2019, the 'Food and Drink' category ranked among the top choices worldwide, reflecting the growing demand for authentic culinary experiences during travel [2]. Once considered merely as a complementary aspect of a trip, food has now become a major influence on tourists' decision-making, shaping both their choice of destinations and the activities they engage in. This shift is further supported by findings from the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), which indicates that 81% of international tourists express a strong interest in exploring local cuisine [3]. Additionally, travelers are

willing to allocate 25-35% of their total budget to food and beverage-related experiences [4]. These figures highlight gastronomy's growing role in travel decisions [5], not only as a key tourism driver but also as a way for destinations to showcase their culinary culture and strengthen their brand image [6].

However, food tourism is no longer merely about enjoying unique culinary experiences. Globalization of the food industry, driven by mass production, industrialized farming, and rapid consumption, has sparked concerns over cultural homogenization, environmental degradation, and the erosion of traditional culinary knowledge [7]. This has led to growing interest in more ethical and community-driven approaches to food tourism. In response, the Slow Food movement emerged in the late 20th century as a counterbalance to fast food culture, advocating for local, sustainable, and heritage-based food practices. This philosophy has since expanded into the SFT, which emphasizes mindful consumption, community

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engagement, and environmental responsibility. More recently, food-loving travelers have shown an increasing preference for hyperlocal experiences, seeking not only to taste local cuisine, but also to support local food producers and engage with the community in meaningful ways. By prioritizing the sustainability and well-being of local residents, this shift aligns with broader efforts to counter mass tourism and promote a more ethical and immersive approach to culinary travel [3].

Vietnam boasts of a rich and diverse culinary heritage that is deeply embedded in its cultural identity. Food is not only a means of sustenance but also a reflection of history, geography, and social traditions, shaping identities and social interactions [8]. In the context of globalization, Vietnamese cuisine has gained international recognition; however, the rapid commercialization of food tourism poses risks to its authenticity and sustainability. The rise of SFT presents an opportunity to balance economic benefits with cultural preservation, ensuring that local food traditions are valued and protected while catering to the growing demand for sustainable and immersive travel experiences. As noted by Mr. Nguyễn Xuân Quỳnh, General Secretary of the Vietnam Chefs Association under the Vietnam Tourism Association, “*Vietnamese cuisine is a valuable resource that enhances the attractiveness of tourist destinations, contributing to the country’s competitiveness on the global tourism map*” [4]. This further reinforces the importance of gastronomy as a strategic asset in tourism development, highlighting the potential of the SFT as a means to showcase Vietnam’s culinary identity while fostering sustainable tourism growth.

While SFT has attracted growing academic and practical attention worldwide, research on its development in the Vietnamese context remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on SFT models in Western countries or selected emerging economies such as India or Malaysia (e.g., Ahlawat & Gautam, 2019; Adeyinka-Ojo & Kho-Lattimore, 2013), leaving a notable gap in understanding how SFT may evolve within Vietnam’s specific socio-cultural, agricultural, and institutional conditions. Addressing this gap, the present study develops a contextualized analysis of SFT in Vietnam by integrating slow philosophy with local culinary heritage and agrotourism practices. In doing so, it contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by elucidating both the opportunities and structural constraints shaping SFT development in a transitional Southeast Asian economy.

This study was conducted using secondary data sources, focusing on the collection, synthesis, and analysis of existing literature related to SFT, sustainable tourism, food tourism, and food heritage conservation. The research reviewed books, scientific articles, documents of management agencies at all levels, and related articles to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Additionally, this study examines case studies of experiential tourism models combined with agrotourism development in Vietnam, providing insights into the practical implementation of SFT.

The study is directed by the following objectives:

1. What are the key prerequisites for the development of SFT?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for the sustainable development of SFT in Vietnam?
3. What strategies and policies should be implemented to foster SFT growth in Vietnam?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The evolution of slow food and its influence on slow philosophy

Since ancient times, humans have recognized the importance of meaningfully using time. Around the 6th to 5th century BCE, in the chapter “Wei Zheng” (為政) of the Analects of Confucius, Confucius offered a profound philosophy: “欲速不达” (Yù sù bù dá), meaning “Haste makes waste” or “If you rush, you will not achieve your desired outcome.” [9] This ancient wisdom from the East emphasizes the value of patience and alignment with the natural rhythm of life. Later, from a distinct cultural and philosophical perspective, British philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) explored a similar idea in *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930). In Chapter 1, *What Makes People Unhappy?* He illustrates how modern individuals, particularly weekend travelers, are so fixated on overtaking others and reaching their destinations that they fail to appreciate the journey itself [10]. His insight underscores a timeless truth: in the relentless pursuit of speed and gratification, people often overlook life’s genuine joy. This insight captures the essence of a modern dilemma: our struggle to slow down, embrace stillness, and cultivate a deeper awareness of the present moment. Though separated by time, geography, and intellectual traditions, these perspectives – one rooted in Eastern philosophy and the other in Western thought – converge on the same timeless truth: the importance of slowing down to foster deeper engagement with life.

While ancient philosophies laid the groundwork for the value of slowness, modern concepts have brought these ideas into contemporary practice, addressing the challenges of industrialization and globalization. The modern notion of slowness is widely attributed to Carlo Petrini, who initiated the Slow Food Movement in Italy as a response to the growing fast food industry. The movement began in 1986 as Arcigola, an organization opposing the opening of McDonald’s near the Spanish Steps in Rome, symbolized the increasing homogenization of global food culture, a trend often termed McDonaldization. This expansion of fast food chains threatened local culinary traditions and accelerated the shift toward standardized, industrialized food production. In 1989, delegates from 15 countries signed the founding manifesto of the International Slow Food Movement in Paris, France, officially marking its establishment as a global initiative [11]. As a non-profit, ecogastronomic, member-supported organization, Slow

Food seeks to counteract the dominance of fast food and the decline of local culinary traditions. The movement aims to revive public interest in the origins, flavors, and broader impacts of food choices on the environment and society [12]. Unlike the industrial food system, which prioritizes efficiency and uniformity, Slow Food promotes the consumption of locally sourced ingredients and traditional cooking techniques, ensuring the preservation of cultural diversity in food. Consequently, this philosophy has played a significant role in shaping contemporary discussions on food sovereignty, ethical consumption, and sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming control over food systems at the local and global levels.

Building upon the principles of Slow Food, Cittaslow emerged to extend these ideals into urban environments and local communities. It aims to enhance quality of life by slowing down daily rhythms, optimizing public spaces, and improving traffic flow [13]. Expanding this philosophy, slow tourism has developed as a natural extension, promoting a deliberate and immersive approach to travel. Unlike mass tourism, which prioritizes the rapid consumption of destinations, slow tourism fosters profound engagement with local cultures, traditions, and ecosystems, promoting sustainable practices [14, 15]. This approach aligns with the ethos of Slow Food, emphasizing a strong connection to place, heritage, and sustainability. Rooted in the Slow Food Movement, the concept of slowness has expanded beyond gastronomy. It now shapes tourism, urban planning, education, and lifestyle. In an era dominated by speed and efficiency, slow philosophy offers a transformative approach to living, encouraging individuals and communities to prioritize mindfulness, sustainability, and cultural preservation. At its core, slow philosophy challenges modern fixation on speed, convenience, and efficiency, advocating instead for a more intentional and mindful way of life.

## 2.2. The emergence of SFT: a sustainable tourism trend

Food tourism is often discussed under various terminologies, such as culinary tourism and gastronomic tourism, all of which emphasize the role of food as a central element in travel experiences. Culinary tourism encompasses a broad spectrum of experiences, from seeking novel flavors out of curiosity to intentionally immersing oneself in the culinary traditions of another culture [16]. This concept extends beyond mere consumption, positioning food as both a cultural gateway and focal point of tourism development. Similarly, Lee et al. (2015) described gastronomic tourism as a form of travel that takes place in regions abundant in culinary resources, where visitors engage in a variety of food-related activities. These may include tours to primary and secondary food producers, participation in culinary festivals, attending food fairs and events, observing cooking demonstrations, and indulging in food tastings – experiences that combine leisure with deeper gastronomic

appreciation [17]. As food tourism continues to evolve, scholars and industry organizations have sought to refine its scope further. Phan Huy Xu and Tran Minh Tam (2016) define food tourism as *“a type of tourism that is organized and guided, leading travelers to destinations where they can learn about, appreciate, and experience food and beverages that carry distinct artistic and cultural values specific to a locality, region, or nation.”* [18] More than just an act of dining, food tourism offers immersive experiences that bridge tourists with the cultural, historical, and production aspects of food. Consequently, it serves as both an economic catalyst and tool for preserving gastronomic traditions, reinforcing the integral role of food in defining a destination’s identity.

Although food tourism has gained global traction, its rapid expansion has raised concerns about sustainability and authenticity. The increasing commercialization and industrialization of culinary experiences driven by international tourism demand has led to the commodification and standardization of traditional cuisines, diminishing culinary originality, and overexploitation of local food resources. Within mass tourism, food tourism has strayed from its original purpose, evolving into “bulk food tourism”, in which food is reduced to a mere commercial commodity. As a result, culinary diversity and traditional food knowledge face erosion, threatening food tourism’s potential for cultural preservation and sustainable development [19]. In response to these challenges, SFT has emerged as a more ethical and sustainable alternative to conventional food tourism. Rather than simply slowing down the pace of culinary tourism, the SFT embodies a philosophical approach centered on sustainability, authenticity, and meaningful local engagement. This model is commonly integrated into homestay programs, small-scale ecotourism, farm visits, farmers’ markets, street food experiences, and artisanal food enterprises, fostering deeper connections between travelers and local food systems [20]. SFT can be defined as a responsible tourism model that fosters authentic, sustainable, and locally rooted food experiences. It promotes active engagement with culinary traditions, local ingredients, and heritage-based practices, and supports cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic fairness. Moving beyond passive consumption, it creates meaningful connections between tourists, local communities, and food heritage.

The foundational principles of the SFT originate from the core values of the Slow Food Movement: Good, Clean, and Fair [12]. A good signifies high-quality, flavorful food that authentically represents a region’s cultural identity. Clean ensures that food production is environmentally responsible, promoting sustainability, biodiversity, and ethical sourcing. Fair guarantees that all stakeholders in the food supply chain, including farmers, artisans, and small business owners, receive equitable economic benefits and recognize their contributions. Guided by these principles, the SFT seeks to preserve biodiversity and culinary heritage, support local economies through fair and sustainable food systems, and promote responsible tourism

that respects the environment and local communities. Travelers are encouraged to participate in farm-to-table dining, visits to organic farms, cooking workshops with local chefs, and cultural exchange programs centered around traditional cuisine. By advocating for a mindful and unhurried approach to travel, the SFT allows visitors to connect with the essence of a place through its food, people, and culinary heritage. This approach aligns with broader sustainable tourism movements, positioning food not only as a means of nourishment but also as a medium for cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and community empowerment [20, 21].

### 2.3. Key requirements for developing SFT

As previously discussed, the SFT represents a sustainable and responsible tourism model that aligns with the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental, and social. By leveraging local gastronomic heritage and traditional agricultural practices, SFT aims to preserve culinary culture, ensure sustainable livelihoods for local communities, protect ecosystems, and promote ethical food systems. For tourists, SFT offers an opportunity for self-discovery through authentic, immersive experiences at a slower pace, while also enabling them to enjoy fresh, high-quality, and health-conscious foods [21]. To successfully develop SFT, several core conditions must be met, encompassing three main dimensions: tourism resources (including local culinary heritage, agriculture, and food systems), slow tourism services (such as infrastructure, experience design, and community participation), and management policies (including certification and educational programs). These dimensions are elaborated below.

#### A strong culinary identity and cultural heritage

A well-established culinary heritage forms the foundation of SFT, where food transcends its role as mere sustenance to become a powerful medium for cultural expression and storytelling [22, 23]. Preserving traditional food knowledge and heritage-based cooking techniques ensures continuity of culinary traditions across generations. Local pride in gastronomy fosters community engagement through storytelling, food rituals, and promotion of indigenous foodways, thereby strengthening cultural identity. Furthermore, recognizing and protecting local food specialties not only preserves authenticity but also enhances their role in sustainable tourism [24, 25].

#### Sustainable and ethical food production systems

Rooted in the Slow Food Movement's core principles of "good, clean, and fair" food, SFT relies on sustainable and ethical food production systems. Small-scale farming and organic agriculture play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity and traditional practices, while reducing dependency on industrial methods [26]. Ethical sourcing and farm-to-table initiatives enhance transparency, benefiting both producers and consumers [20, 21].

Additionally, minimizing food waste and prioritizing seasonal, local ingredients help reduce environmental impact and maintain culinary authenticity.

#### Tourism infrastructure and slow tourism experiences

To uphold the core values of the Slow Food Movement, the SFT must provide meaningful slow tourism experiences supported by a well-structured infrastructure. This involves prioritizing immersive, small-scale, and community-driven tourism over mass tourism. Accessibility to eco-tourism sites, culinary trails, and rural food experiences enables tourists to engage directly with local food production and traditions [27]. Policies should support sustainability and authenticity by discouraging mass tourism in favor of localized initiatives. Slow tourism experiences such as farm visits, cooking workshops, and heritage food markets foster deeper connections between tourists and local cultures [23, 27].

#### Community involvement and economic benefits for locals

SFT thrives on local culinary heritage, with communities serving as both custodians and beneficiaries. Their active participation in the value chain is particularly crucial as it ensures that tourism-generated income directly supports small-scale producers. By fostering direct producer-consumer connections, SFT promotes equitable economic distribution and prioritizes local economies over industrial producers. Strengthening food cooperatives and farmer markets further fosters sustainable business models [21].

#### Policy support and institutional backing

Government policies play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability and scalability of SFT. Localities joining the Slow Food Movement must meet the certification requirements for sustainable food production, such as Presidia and Ark of Taste [28]. However, a tourism destination developing SFT does not necessarily need to fulfill all membership requirements of the Slow Food Movement, but must still comply with relevant certification standards. Establishing certification programs and funding mechanisms to support sustainable practices are fundamental prerequisites for SFT development. Additionally, education and capacity-building initiatives for stakeholders are essential to foster long-term engagement in responsible food production and tourism. These measures not only enhance the viability of SFT, but also strengthen local food systems and contribute to sustainable tourism-driven economic growth.

### 3. Case studies of SFT: global inspirations and Vietnam's potential

In recent years, various destinations worldwide have successfully integrated SFT as a key component of their sustainable tourism strategies. These initiatives demonstrate how local culinary heritage, ethical food

production, and immersive travel experiences can contribute to both economic growth and cultural preservation. Within the scope of this article, we present notable case studies of SFT experiences from established tourist destinations that offer valuable insights into Vietnam's tourism sector. Furthermore, to contextualize the feasibility of SFT within Vietnam, we examined selected experiential tourism models that incorporate agrotourism development, showcasing how food-based tourism can be leveraged as a driver of rural economic empowerment and cultural sustainability. These case studies serve as references for potential adaptations and policy recommendations, guiding Vietnam towards a more sustainable and community-driven approach to gastronomic tourism.

### 3.1. Successful international case studies

#### Italy: The birthplace of SFT

Italy is the birthplace of the Slow Food Movement, which emerged in the 1980s as a response to the rise of fast food culture. Over the decades, Italy has successfully incorporated Slow Food principles into its culinary tourism and rural development, creating immersive gastronomic experiences that emphasize local traditions, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable food systems. Visitors engage with artisanal producers and traditional farming practices to support small-scale farmers and to strengthen local economies. Key initiatives include the Slow Food Presidia, which safeguards endangered food products and heritage ingredients [29], and the Terra Madre Network, which connects farmers, chefs, and academics to promote sustainable food production [30]. Additionally, regional gastronomy trails, such as the Wine Roads of Tuscany and the White Truffle Routes of Piedmont, encourage slow travel while showcasing regional food identities. Beyond traditional culinary trails, the country is witnessing the emergence of “Eno-Slow” tourism, a refined profile of wine tourists who prioritize multisensory, emotional, and hedonistic experiences over mass consumption [31]. The Italian government plays a crucial role in preserving SFT, with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) labels ensuring authenticity for renowned products [32]. A Slow Food certification further promotes locally sourced cuisine, while financial incentives for organic farmers and agrotourism enterprises reinforce Italy's commitment to sustainable, community-driven food tourism [33].

#### Gilbert, United States

Gilbert has successfully transitioned from its historical identity as the “Hay Capital of the World” into a prominent model for SFT by leveraging its agricultural heritage and community-driven initiatives. The town's slow food corridor and Agritopia – a sustainable urban farm – function as essential social hubs that integrate farm-to-table dining with educational outreach. This case reflects the rising global demand for hyperlocal experiences and authenticity, which are identified as transformative

research directions in modern gastronomic tourism [34]. By prioritizing storytelling and sensory engagement, Gilbert demonstrates how government-backed experiential marketing can create a thriving SFT destination [35]. This shift aligns with the travel lifestyle preferences of tourists who increasingly seek non-industrialized, authentic culinary interactions [17].

#### Mold, Wales, United Kingdom

Mold serves as a pioneering case of integrating the Cittáslow Movement into a sustainable tourism strategy. By focusing on environmental sustainability and quality of life, Mold has integrated these movements into its tourism offerings, focusing on local food, environmental sustainability, and community engagement [13]. The town has successfully promoted local food products through initiatives such as the Mold Farmers' Market, which operates monthly and emphasizes local produce within a 20-mile radius, helping to reduce food miles and global pollution. Additionally, the Mold Food Festival, launched in 2006, had grown significantly, attracting thousands of visitors and showcasing over 100 local food producers by 2013. Mold's membership in Cittáslow has been a key factor in its ability to promote local food culture, improve quality of life, and foster sustainable tourism practices. The town's commitment to these principles has also contributed to economic benefits, as businesses gain added value by promoting local production and maintaining sustainable practices. Furthermore, public-private partnerships have been crucial for raising awareness and supporting Mold's role as a sustainable, food-focused destination [21].

#### Uttarakhand, India

Uttarakhand is positioning itself as a leading SFT destination in India by capitalizing on its unique Garhwali and Kumaoni culinary heritage. Recent systematic reviews highlight that slow tourism in this region acts as a vital catalyst for sustainability, particularly in highland areas where biodiversity conservation is linked to community economic empowerment [36]. Recognizing this potential, the Uttarakhand government has implemented financial aid programs, agricultural investments, and infrastructure enhancements to support slow food initiatives. Key developments include allocating INR 10.4 billion (approximately USD 12.5 million) for traditional crop promotion, launching awareness campaigns, and hosting food festivals to highlight regional specialties. Collaboration between local farmers, hospitality businesses, and travel agencies has also strengthened SFT by integrating farm-to-table dining, curated food tours, and regional gastronomy experiences into mainstream tourism. Additionally, quality control measures and hospitality training programs ensure that SFT maintains high food safety standards and service excellence, enhancing visitor confidence [37].

#### Sarawak, Malaysia

Bario, a rural destination in Sarawak, Malaysia, has embraced Slow Food events as a high-yield strategy for

rural tourism development. Since 2005, the town has organized an annual Slow Food and Cultural Festival, which has grown in popularity, attracting both local and international tourists. The event focused on local food, culture, and sustainability, enhancing the destination's appeal and generating economic benefits for the community. Tourists participate in the event to experience local traditions through food, music, and cultural displays, which enrich the tourism product and increase tourist spending. While the festival has successfully increased tourist spending and empowered the local community, it underscores a critical global challenge identified in recent literature: the need for professional marketing to balance the preservation of authenticity with international visibility [34, 38].

### 3.2. From global inspirations to the emerging SFT model in Vietnam

Within the scope of this paper, we examine three notable cases in Vietnam where culinary culture and agricultural values have been successfully integrated into local tourism development. The analysis assesses the extent to which these cases align with the five core conditions for the future sustainable development of the SFT model.

#### Duong Lam Village, Hanoi

The ancient village of Duong Lam (Hanoi) serves as a prime example of leveraging strong culinary identity and cultural heritage by community-based tourism. Known for its rich cultural heritage, Duong Lam stands out as an ideal destination for sustainable tourism, offering a range of OCOP (One Commune One Product) products such as *gà mía* (Mía chicken),  *kẹo vừng* (sesame candy),  *kẹo lạc* (peanut candy),  *bánh gai* (gai cake), and  *tương* (fermented soy sauce), which showcase the region's agricultural and culinary traditions. In addition to these celebrated products, Duong Lam offers a variety of traditional dishes, including  *cá kho tương* (fish cooked in fermented soy sauce),  *thịt quay đôn* (roast pork), and  *chè lam* (sticky rice cake), providing visitors with an authentic taste of the local gastronomy [39]. Beyond its culinary appeal, Duong Lam is home to tangible heritage, such as ancient houses, communal structures, and historical monuments, as well as intangible heritage, including traditional festivals and craftsmanship, thus making it a rich cultural resource for tourism. By offering homestays and participation in traditional crafts like candy production, the model fosters community involvement and creates immersive slow tourism experiences [40]. These offerings align closely with the principles of SFT, emphasizing sustainability, local traditions, and community involvement while fostering both economic and cultural growth in the region. Its recognition with the ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Product Award 2024 reflects the potential for policy support to elevate localized initiatives into sustainable tourism brands.

#### Tra Que, Hoi An

Tra Que (Hoi An) exemplifies the integration of sustainable and ethical food production with tourism. Its 400-year-old tradition of organic herb farming highlights a commitment to biodiversity and seasonal ingredients. Renowned for its organic herbs, the village's culinary identity is showcased through signature dishes such as  *bánh xèo* (Vietnamese pancakes),  *mì Quảng* (Quang noodles), and  *Tam Hũu* – a dish of pork and shrimp wrapped in basil leaves. Designed for immersive engagement, slow tourism experiences include hands-on cooking classes, guided tours through lush herb gardens, and active participation in agricultural activities like herbs planting. These activities embody the village's five-flavor philosophy and reflect an enduring commitment to sustainable, community-based farming traditions. Cultural events, such as the  *Lễ Hội Cầu Bông* (Flower Worship Festival) held annually on the 7th day of the Lunar New Year, further enrich the visitor experience by showcasing traditional practices and community values. Tra Que's commitment to sustainable tourism has earned international recognition, including being named the best tourism village of the year by the UN Tourism in 2024, and listed among the Top 10 most attractive destinations in Vietnam by Le Figaro [41]. The case of Tra Que illustrates how institutional endorsement can validate and safeguard local gastronomic heritage. By integrating agro-tourism, culinary practices, and cultural traditions, the village is well-positioned to serve as a model for SFT approach: one that promotes environmental sustainability, community development, and the preservation of local heritage, while offering tourists authentic and enriching experiences.

#### Can Tho, Mekong Delta

Can Tho (Mekong Delta) exemplifies the integration of agricultural identity and sustainable production systems within the emerging SFT framework. As a major hub for rice, tropical fruits, and seafood production, the city operates over 100 hectares of VietGAP-certified farms ensuring safe and clean produce. Its adoption of high-tech agricultural practices such as hydroponics, biological pest control, and AI-powered systems under the "*Smart Agriculture and Food Safety with Artificial Intelligence*" initiative [42] demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to environmental sustainability. Slow tourism practices are embedded in the city's agricultural landscape, offering immersive experiences through hands-on participation in rice planting, fruit picking, and traditional fishing in districts such as Phong Dien, Cai Rang, and Binh Thuy. Visitors are also invited to engage with local culinary traditions through dishes like  *bánh xèo* (Vietnamese pancakes) and  *cá tai tương chiên xù* (fried giant gourami), enjoyed in the context of vibrant orchard gardens and the iconic floating markets of Cai Rang and Phong Dien. These interconnected initiatives yield tangible economic benefits for local communities while promoting cultural and ecological resilience. Nonetheless, the absence of a standardized governance framework to align traditional practices with technological innovations remains a critical

barrier to consolidating a coherent and scalable SFT model in Can Tho.

The analysis of these case studies reveals that while Vietnam possesses a robust foundation in culinary identity and grassroots community involvement, no single model yet fulfills all five core conditions for sustainable SFT. This partial alignment highlights a critical transition: existing initiatives demonstrate localized innovation but are hindered by structural gaps in specialized infrastructure and formal policy frameworks. Consequently, these cases illuminate the systemic challenges of scaling authentic, slow-paced experiences within a commercialized tourism landscape. Addressing these gaps is essential for evolving fragmented agrotourism models into a cohesive, sustainable SFT strategy for Vietnam.

## 4. Opportunities and challenges for SFT development in Vietnam

### 4.1. Opportunities for SFT development in Vietnam

Vietnam possesses significant potential for SFT development owing to its rich culinary heritage, diverse agricultural landscapes, and increasing interest in sustainable tourism.

#### Abundant culinary and agricultural resources: A gateway to SFT

One of the key prerequisites for developing SFT is the availability of tourism resources, with traditional local cuisine playing a crucial role. Vietnam's diverse culinary traditions, deeply rooted in regional specialities and historical influences [1], offer a strong foundation for SFT. Vietnamese cuisine is characterized by its vast regional diversity, where each area showcases distinct culinary traditions, flavors, and cooking techniques [43]. This richness, combined with a harmonious balance between ingredients, refined preparation methods, accessibility, and artistic presentation, enhances its appeal to both domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, Vietnam's agriculture provides an abundance of fresh, high-quality, and locally sourced ingredients, ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of its food experiences [44]. Vietnam has historically been an agricultural country, with wet rice cultivation serving as the foundation for its economy and food culture. This deep-rooted agricultural tradition has profoundly shaped Vietnamese cuisine, which primarily relies on cultivated crops, such as rice, and aquatic resources, such as shrimp, crabs, and fish. Consequently, there is a strong and intrinsic connection between Vietnamese cuisine and its agricultural heritage [45]. Alongside its diverse culinary traditions, there is increasing focus on green gastronomy to promote fresh, sustainable, and nutrient-rich food sources. This approach not only strengthens Vietnam's agricultural resources, but also

contributes to building a national culinary brand that balances tradition with modern sustainability goals [46].

#### Rising interest in sustainable and experiential tourism

The global trend towards sustainable tourism has led to an increasing demand for authentic and responsible tourism experiences. In this context, Vietnam has emerged as a prominent destination for international tourists who seek not only natural beauty, but also culturally immersive experiences. Beyond renowned landscapes, visitors are increasingly interested in engaging with local communities through activities such as exploring traditional craft villages, participating in cultural festivals, and experiencing daily life. This growing preference underscores a broader shift towards experiential tourism, where cultural authenticity and meaningful interactions play a central role in shaping travel decisions [47]. This trend is evident not only among international visitors but is also increasingly reflected in the travel preferences of domestic tourists. Domestic tourists are increasingly embracing slow tourism and prioritizing deeper engagement with local cultures and traditions. Beyond the continued popularity of coastal tourism, there is rising interest in community-based, eco, and rural tourism. Additionally, a more responsible segment of travelers has emerged, with a stronger commitment to sustainable practices influenced by post-pandemic awareness. Concerns over over-tourism have also led to a shift toward exploring lesser-known destinations, reflecting a broader transformation in domestic travel behavior toward sustainability, cultural authenticity, and meaningful experiences [48]. Consequently, this evolving consumer behavior creates a favorable market for SFT development.

#### Government support and policy development

Vietnam's government has recognized the importance of sustainable tourism development and has introduced various initiatives to promote local gastronomy and agrotourism. The Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030 emphasizes sustainable and inclusive growth based on green development principles. A key focus of this strategy is the development of cultural tourism products that preserve and promote Vietnam's historical and traditional heritage. In particular, the country's diverse and distinctive culinary traditions are being leveraged to create unique tourism experiences that enhance Vietnam's global competitiveness [49]. By integrating local food production with tourism, Vietnam aims to establish a strong national tourism brand that balances economic growth, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. Programs such as 'One Commune One Product' (OCOP), VietGAP certification, and regional food festivals serve as tangible examples of this strategic direction, providing visitors with authentic and responsible tourism experiences while supporting local economies. Events such as *the Southern Folk Cake Festival* and *the Indigenous Ethnic Culinary Festival in Kon Tum* exemplify how local authorities leverage Vietnam's gastronomic heritage to

promote regional tourism. These festivals attract visitors and serve as cultural showcases, introducing traditional dishes, cooking techniques, and indigenous ingredients to a wider audience.

## 4.2. Challenges to the development of SFT in Vietnam

Despite Vietnam's significant potential for SFT, several challenges hinder its development. These challenges primarily stem from a lack of policy support, gaps in experience design and service quality, low stakeholder awareness, and risks of over-commercialization.

### Limited policy support and awareness of SFT

While the Vietnamese government has shown increasing support for sustainable tourism and gastronomy-related initiatives, specific policies dedicated to SFT remain underdeveloped. Many stakeholders, including policymakers, tourism businesses, and local communities, still lack a comprehensive understanding of SFT's principles and potential benefits of SFTs. The absence of clear regulatory frameworks and targeted incentives has made it difficult for local initiatives to scale up and integrate SFT into broader tourism strategies.

### Limitations of services related to slow tourism experiences

Despite Vietnam's rich and diverse culinary heritage, experiential food tourism has not yet fully developed to match its true potential. The implementation of this tourism model remains limited in scope, primarily concentrated in a few well-known destinations rather than being expanded nationwide, restricting the accessibility and diversity of slow food experiences [43]. This underdevelopment is further exacerbated by the inadequate availability of professional hospitality services tailored to SFT, which limits the attractiveness of slow food destinations to high-value tourists. Many rural and agricultural areas that hold the greatest potential for SFT lack well-developed tourism services, including accommodations, guided experiences, and visitor engagement programs. Additionally, the absence of well-connected culinary tourism routes makes it challenging for travelers to experience a seamless slow food journey across multiple destinations [50].

### Food safety and quality control issues

Ensuring food safety and maintaining high quality standards in traditional food production remains a significant challenge. While certification programs such as VietGAP aim to regulate food quality, many small-scale producers struggle to meet these standards because of financial and logistical constraints. The risks of food contamination, improper handling, and inconsistent quality may undermine consumer confidence in SFT experiences. Furthermore, the lack of a standardized certification system for sustainable and safe food production exacerbates

concerns about food hygiene and authenticity, which are critical for attracting international tourists [50].

### Lack of skilled human resources and training

The shortage of trained professionals in the tourism and hospitality sectors poses a challenge for the development of SFT in Vietnam. Many local communities and tourism service providers lack the expertise to curate and manage authentic slow food experiences. Although Vietnam's culinary traditions are deeply rooted in its cultural heritage, there is a need for structured training programs to integrate storytelling, cultural interpretation, and sustainability into food tourism services [50]. Additionally, tourism operators tend to focus on mass-market food tourism rather than on adopting SFT principles, limiting the growth of this niche market.

### Potential conflicts of interest among local stakeholders

Local farmers and food artisans play crucial roles in the development of SFT. However, disparities in economic benefits and decision-making power among stakeholders may lead to conflicts between local producers, tourism operators, and government authorities [51]. If the commercialization of traditional food practices is not properly managed, it could result in unfair economic distribution, discouraging local communities from actively participating in SFT initiatives. Ensuring that local producers receive fair compensation and are actively involved in the value chain is essential for the sustainable growth of SFT.

### Risks of over-commercialization and loss of authenticity

The increasing popularity of food tourism in Vietnam presents both opportunities and challenges. One of the major concerns is the over-commercialization of traditional culinary practices, where dishes are modified or mass-produced to cater to tourists' preferences. This phenomenon can lead to the dilution of authenticity, as traditional cooking techniques and locally sourced ingredients may be replaced by industrialized processes [52]. Balancing economic growth with the preservation of culinary authenticity remains a critical issue that requires careful planning and policy interventions.

## 5. Recommendations for SFT development in Vietnam

To fully unlock the potential of SFT in Vietnam while addressing existing challenges, a comprehensive approach that integrates policy support, infrastructure improvement, capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable promotion strategies is required. These recommendations aim to create a structured framework for the sustainable development of SFT, ensuring both economic and cultural benefits while preserving the authenticity of Vietnam's culinary heritage.

### Strengthening policy support and institutional framework

A dedicated regulatory framework for SFT should be developed using national guidelines and sustainability criteria to ensure responsible tourism practices. Financial incentives such as tax reductions and subsidies should be introduced to encourage small-scale farmers, food artisans, and tourism enterprises to adopt sustainable practices. Collaboration with Slow Food International will help Vietnam align with global best practices and enhance its international recognition.

### Enhancing infrastructure and slow tourism services

To improve accessibility and visitor experience, investments should focus on developing culinary tourism routes that link key gastronomic destinations. Upgrading rural infrastructure, including eco-friendly accommodations and visitor facilities, is essential for sustainable tourism growth. Establishing slow food hubs, featuring local markets, organic farms, and traditional food workshops, will create focal points for SFT activities. Expanding farm-to-table dining, guided heritage food tours, and immersive culinary experiences will enhance engagement and attract responsible travelers.

### Capacity building and human resource development

Training programs should focus on equipping tour guides and local communities with cultural storytelling, traditional food preparation, and sustainable food sourcing skills. Collaboration with tourism associations, community groups, and local cooperatives will help develop specialized courses to enhance the authenticity and engagement of SFT experiences.

### Strengthening stakeholder collaboration and community participation

Collaboration among government agencies, tourism businesses, local communities, and food producers is essential for SFT's success. Supporting community-led initiatives will ensure that economic benefits are fairly distributed, while preserving culinary traditions. Establishing local food cooperatives will enhance the connections between producers and consumers, and promote sustainable food systems and fair trade. Empowering women and marginalized groups in food tourism will also contribute to social sustainability and inclusive economic development.

### Promoting authenticity and sustainable food practices

A national certification program should be established to guarantee food safety, quality, and sustainability in SFT. Encouraging the use of local, organic, and seasonal ingredients will support sustainable agriculture, while preserving the authenticity of Vietnam's culinary heritage. Cultural storytelling should be integrated into food

experiences to deepen visitor engagement and to reinforce the value of traditional food practices.

### Leveraging digital marketing and technology for SFT promotion

A dedicated SFT Vietnam online platform should be developed that features curated itineraries, food maps, and certified experiences. Digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, and VR experiences, will help showcase Vietnam's slow food culture globally. Implementing smart tourism technologies such as QR codes at food sites will provide instant access to cultural narratives and enhance visitor experiences. Travel agencies should also integrate SFT packages into their offerings to attract responsible travelers.

### Organizing culinary festivals and cultural events

Culinary festivals and cultural events should be leveraged to promote SFT. Developing regional and national slow food festivals will celebrate Vietnam's diverse culinary heritage while providing platforms for local producers. Participation in global Slow Food events will increase international exposure and knowledge exchange. Seasonal farm-to-table dining events should be organized to allow visitors to engage in traditional food production and preparation, strengthening their appreciation for Vietnam's gastronomic heritage.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of SFT and assessed its opportunities and challenges in the context of Vietnam. With a rich culinary heritage and diverse agricultural resources, Vietnam holds significant potential for SFT development. However, limitations in infrastructure, stakeholder awareness, and policy support present notable challenges that need to be addressed. To foster sustainable growth of SFT, this study recommends strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing food safety standards, promoting community engagement, and leveraging digital marketing. These strategic measures can help position Vietnam as a leading destination for responsible and immersive gastronomic tourism and ensure a balance between economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Future research should incorporate empirical studies to validate these findings and explore best practices from other SFT destinations. By integrating slow food principles into its tourism strategy, Vietnam can enhance its global competitiveness while fostering a more ethical and sustainable travel experience.

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