# Components of tourists' palace cuisine dining experiences: the case of ottoman-concept restaurants

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In the field of tourism, numerous studies have been conducted on tourists' food experiences. However, more studies are needed to comprehend tourists' dining experience in unique cuisines. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to examine the components of tourists' dining experiences related to palace cuisine foods.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to capture the components of tourists' dining experiences. The online narratives of tourists (n = 911) who had experienced Ottoman palace cuisine in Istanbul were obtained from an online travel platform (TripAdvisor) and analyzed using content analysis.

**Findings** – Seven main components were revealed: perceived authenticity, perceived service quality, knowledge, a sense of royalty, food specialties and attributes, a memorable experience and a sense of awe.

**Practical implications** – By identifying components of the palace cuisine dining experience and their relevant importance, the findings of this study can increase service providers' knowledge and facilitate their jobs. To be able to meet the expectations of tourists experiencing the palace cuisine, service providers can improve their services by considering research results.

**Originality/value** – Results revealed that obtained six dimensions were parallel with previous studies on food experience; however, this study uncovered a previously unexplored dimension named a sense of royalty. This can be shown as the unique contribution of this study to the tourist food experience literature.

**Keywords** Tourist experience, Food experience, Gastronomic destination, User-generated content, TripAdvisor

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

It is a well-known fact that local cuisine is one of the most important attractions for destinations (Dedeoglu *et al.*, 2022). To gain unique experiences, many tourists seek attractive destinations that offer multifaceted cultural experiences. In today's world, food can be considered a significant way of experiencing the local culture (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022; Cifci *et al.*, 2022a, b; Qian *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, destination practitioners, who are aware of this situation, have started focusing on local food to increase the attractions of destinations (Lin *et al.*, 2023; Park and Widyanta, 2022).

Moreover, the topic of tourists' food experiences also attracts the interest of scholars researching on tourism. In this context, in the tourism literature, there are various studies

focusing on local food experiences (Lin *et al.*, 2023; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019) and street food experiences of tourists (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a, b; Ozcelik and Akova, 2021). These previous studies have contributed to the expansion of the food tourism literature by discovering new dimensions (Kattiyapornpong *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, Le *et al.* (2021) claimed that online reviews on user-generated content (UGC) web sites display a vital role in comprehending tourist dining experiences. Uncovering the components of tourists' dining experiences can help restaurant managers develop some strategies (Vu *et al.*, 2019). Examining the content created on UGC platforms can also give destination practitioners a chance to understand the experiences of tourists and improve their services (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b). Although these reviews are helpful for service providers, most of the previous research has investigated customer reviews related to their food experiences in terms of local or street food (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a).

Additionally, there are limited efforts to explore tourists' food experiences with unique cuisines. To expand the literature related to food tourism, further research on tourists' dining experiences in unique cuisines needs to be carried out. There is also no comprehensive study on the tourists' dining experiences regarding the palace cuisine, which is a unique type of cuisine. Therefore, the current study plans to fill this knowledge gap. Specifically, it tries to answer the following research question: What components constitute the dining experience of tourists who experience the palace cuisine?

With its extensive historical foundation, sophisticated cuisine and culture, Istanbul offers enormous potential to contribute to the development of food tourism. It offers different culinary experiences for tourists, such as street food, local food, ethnic cuisine, Anatolian cuisine, Turkish cuisine, international cuisine and Ottoman palace cuisine. Each of these cuisines attracts the attention of tourists and contributes to the attractiveness of Istanbul by broadening the tourist food experiences (Ozcelik and Akova, 2021).

Istanbul had been the capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires for a long time. For centuries, it has brought together the food culture of different civilizations (Okumus and Cetin, 2018). Members of three holy religions have lived together Istanbul for a long time, and these different cultures have enriched the sophisticated palace cuisine. This cuisine, which was served only to royals and privileged courtiers in the past and which differs from other cuisines in terms of presentation and content, is today offered to tourists (Batu and Batu, 2018). However, there is a lack of research examining the experience of tourists with Ottoman palace cuisine in this city. Therefore, examining and revealing the experiences of tourists is necessary to promote and market the cuisine as an important touristic product.

Today, destinations competing in the global travel market have increasingly put forward their cultural values that can increase their attractiveness to tourists. As a niche market and an important cultural heritage, palace cuisine has the potential to generate high income and increase the attractiveness and image of a destination (Wondirad *et al.*, 2021). For this reason, investigating the food experiences of tourists who have experienced the palace cuisine is of great importance. In previous studies, dining experiences such as ethnic cuisine (Chhabra *et al.*, 2013), local cuisine (Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014) and street food (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a, b; Ozcelik and Akova, 2021) have been investigated.

However, it can be considered that unlike other cuisines, the palace cuisine may be perceived differently by tourists due to its content and presentation characteristics. Furthermore, the dimensions of experiences may also differ. In this context, understanding the experiences of tourists in the palace cuisine can significantly contribute to the development of appropriate marketing strategies for destination practitioners and businesses. In summary, this research will allow destination practitioners to plan their marketing activities and restaurant managers to improve their services based on research findings. In addition, this study will also contribute to the expansion of the literature related to the food experiences of tourists.

## Literature review

### Food tourism and food tourist

Food, which is a component of cultural character of any destination, can enhance the positive image of the destination and even assist in establishing a city brand (Rezapouraghdam *et al.*, 2022). Thus, food is vital for marketing a destination (Dixit and Prayag, 2022). Since tourists spend about one-third of their traveling budget on food and beverages, food is recognized as an essential tool in terms of tourism (Vesci and Botti, 2019). Furthermore, food is increasingly seen as a crucial tool in the creation of niche tourism and niche destinations (Dixit and Prayag, 2022). Thanks to these benefits, food has been on the agenda of researchers in the tourism and hospitality fields (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a, b; Hussain *et al.*, 2022).

Food tourism refers to visits to exhibits, festivals, eateries and gastronomic destinations (Vesci and Botti, 2019), and it is a significant way to experience the local culture (Cifci *et al.*, 2022b). Moreover, tourism scholars have conducted various studies on food tourism. Some of these studies have investigated the context of destination food image (Hashemi *et al.*, 2021), halal food (Jia and Chaozhi, 2021), tourism attractions (Jannah *et al.*, 2022), etc. Additionally, the number of studies regarding food tourists is also constantly increasing (Akdag *et al.*, 2018; Wan and Choi, 2022).

Seyitoglu (2021) stated that food tourists, unlike other tourists, have specific needs for tourism products and services (e.g. knowledge and getting to know the culture). According to Seyitoglu (2021), these tourists are mainly open to learning in-depth cultural information about a place's history, eating customs, local customs, social interactions, etc., through its cuisine. Moreover, they evaluate their level of satisfaction with a destination based on the dining experiences they have had in there (Moral-Cuadra *et al.*, 2022). Thus, dining experiences are important in destination choices (Dixit and Prayag, 2022). However, only some tourists visiting a gastronomic destination can be classified as food tourists. Whereas the aim of some tourists is direct food tourism, the aim of some is not food tourism directly (Moral-Cuadra *et al.*, 2022). Even they may have coincidentally participated in the food experience while at that destination.

According to Wan and Choi (2022), there are two different views about food tourists in the literature. Food tourists, according to one group, have specific geodemographic characteristics, travel behavioral patterns, visiting patterns, travel reasons and food interests. On the other hand, other groups claimed that these tourists are not homogeneous with standardized demographic characteristics and travel behavior patterns. As a result, ideas on whether the food tourists are a distinct market category are still extremely opposite (Wan and Choi, 2022).

### Tourists' food experiences

The food experience is considered one of the essential parts of the tourist experience because it offers tourists the opportunity to taste, recognize and learn new tastes from different cultures. In addition, the food experience, seen as a fun activity, is sometimes the primary purpose of a trip for tourists, while sometimes it plays a supporting role. In some studies on tourists' experiences, it has been determined that the food experience is one of the essential motivations that attract tourists. It has been revealed that tourists who have positive experiences want to visit the same place again (Cifci *et al.*, 2022b; Ozcelik and Akova, 2021).

Various studies examining tourists' food experiences (Sahin and Kiliclar, 2022; Soonsan and Somkai, 2021) and investigating the components of these experiences (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b) have been conducted recently. In their research, Ryu *et al.* (2008) highlighted three critical factors of the food experience: service, food and ambience. By emphasizing the local food markets, Björk and Kauppinen-Raisänen (2014) explored the factors contributing to travelers' dining experiences. Moreover, some studies on different tourism types have revealed that

food specialties and attributes are essential for improving the tourists' experiences (Sthapit, 2017). According to Nemeschansky (2020), portion sizes, menu content and variety, comfort, location, service quality and atmosphere play a supportive and vital role in creating a good food experience.

Moreover, in previous studies, food specialties and attributes (Sthapit, 2017), a memorable experience (Seyitoglu, 2021), perceived authenticity, knowledge (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b) and a sense of awe (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022c) have been expressed as important dimensions that constitute the dining experience of tourists. Shortly, it can be said that in previous studies, some components related to the dining experience have been determined and explored; however, new and unexplored components can also be added to these as the theme changes.

It is also possible to mention various studies focusing on exciting issues such as ethnic restaurant experiences (Ingerson and Kim, 2016), robotic restaurant experiences (Seyitoglu and Ivanov, 2020), vegetarian restaurant experiences (Nilashi *et al.*, 2021) and halal restaurant experiences (Hossain *et al.*, 2022). Although researchers have conducted some exciting research on food experiences, there is still a gap in the literature on how tourists evaluate their experiences related to the unique cuisines of a particular region and certain types of restaurants. Moreover, studies that examine the dining experiences of tourists based on palace cuisines have not been encountered in the literature yet. Therefore, in this research, Ottoman palace cuisine was chosen as the topic of the study, and the dining experiences of tourists in the palace cuisine were investigated. In addition, the locations of restaurants serving food belonging to Ottoman palace cuisine in Istanbul were selected as the research area.

### Ottoman palace cuisine

Royal cuisines are unique with their own culture. There are various examples around the world. For example, Korea's Chosun royal cuisine has unique dishes and its own protocol culture (Chung *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Ottoman palace cuisine differs from other cuisines with its unique characteristics and dishes. However, this differentiation process did not take place immediately, but it emerged as a result of changes and knowledge accumulation lasting hundreds of years (Batu and Batu, 2018).

The cuisine was a meaningful part of palace life for the Ottomans. The public and palace kitchens comprised the two main pillars of Ottoman cuisine. The palace kitchen included showy tables for the sultan and the council members. The cooks frequently created new dishes to feed the crowd in the opulent setting of the palace. The development of Ottoman palace cuisine continued for many years, and this development gained momentum in the 15th century (Batu and Batu, 2018). This cuisine continued to develop until the 19th century and reached its final state in the 18th and 19th centuries, a period in which modernity and tradition were used together with the effect of westernization. As a result of this long journey, rich palace cuisine emerged; however, today only a particular part of the palace cuisine is known and used less (Hatipoglu and Batman, 2014).

In this cuisine, stew, sheep and lamb meat cooked with butter, chicken and goat meat, cutlet, meatball varieties, rice pilaf varieties, soups cooked with broth and dishes made with legumes come to the fore (Solmaz and Altiner, 2018). Today, these dishes attract the attention of tourists visiting Istanbul (Ozcelik and Akova, 2021). Therefore, exploring the components of the palace food experiences of tourists via user-generated content can help better understand these components and improve appropriate marketing strategies and services for the palace cuisine concept restaurants.

### User-generated content and tourist experiences

UGC refers to media content (user reviews) produced by customers (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008) (such as online reviews about a business or destination), and these reviews help learn about

the services and attractions at businesses or destinations (Oliveira and Casais, 2019; Thanh and Kirova, 2018). Scholars interested in tourism have used UGC to investigate hotel experiences (Barreda and Bilgihan, 2013), cycling tourists' experiences (Chiu and Leng, 2017), photos in the restaurant selection (Oliveira and Casais, 2019), hotel guest satisfaction (Lee et al., 2020), destination images (Wang et al., 2021), the financial performance of restaurants (Abdullah et al., 2022) and tourist experiences (Saydam et al., 2022). However, few studies have used UGC in the context of tourist food experiences (Wen et al., 2020).

Jia (2019) investigated tourists' dining experiences by examining online user-generated content about restaurants. Wen et al. (2020) explored factors influencing the perceptions of consumers toward restaurants via user-generated content. Despite the recent upward trend in user-generated content on tourists' dining experiences, the palace cuisine experiences of tourists remain unexplored still. Thus, further UGC research is needed to analyze tourist food experiences in order to expand the tourism literature.

## Research methodology
### Study site: Istanbul
In this study, to understand the components of the dining experiences of tourists, a qualitative research method (content analysis), which is frequently adopted by tourism researchers who research restaurants, was used (Montargot et al., 2022). Using this method, the reviews of the tourists on palace cuisine dining experiences were analyzed. Istanbul, which attracted 14.9 million foreign visitors in 2019, was chosen as the work area (Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2020).

There are several reasons why Istanbul was chosen as the work area for this research. First, Istanbul is widely recognized as one of Turkey's most popular tourist destinations (Alrawadieh et al., 2020; Cifci et al., 2022b) and an important destination in terms of cultural attractiveness. Second, since Istanbul is the former capital of the Ottoman Empire, it includes more cultural restaurants serving with the concept of Ottoman Palace Cuisine. Third, the increasing number of restaurants serving Ottoman palace cuisine dishes to their customers is another prominent reason for selecting the research area (Karaosmanoglu, 2006).

### Research design and online platform
In this study, purposive sampling, frequently used in qualitative studies, was used as a sampling method (Suri, 2011). To capture the dining experiences of tourists, data were collected from TripAdvisor, which is the world's leading online travel review website.

There are several main reasons why TripAdvisor was chosen for this study. First, it is preferred by many researchers studying travel, tourism, accommodation and food in terms of learning about consumer experiences (Arica et al., 2021; Bornarel et al., 2021; Dincer and Alrawadieh, 2017). Second, this platform contains many reviews about culinary and gastronomic experiences (Yigit and Percin, 2021), such as Ottoman Palace Cuisine. Third, data collection is easy since it has a simple and user-friendly interface. In addition, it is also observed that the number of studies using tourists' online reviews has been increasing recently (Book and Tanford, 2020; Lei and Law, 2015).

### Data collection, coding and analysis procedures
Figure 1 shows the research process. The data collection process was carried out on October 2021. 3,655 tourist reviews were obtained at the end of this process. Then, the pre-processing data stage was applied. The pre-processing data stage contained the elimination of reviews with missing information, non-English and duplicate comments (Zhu et al., 2021). As a result

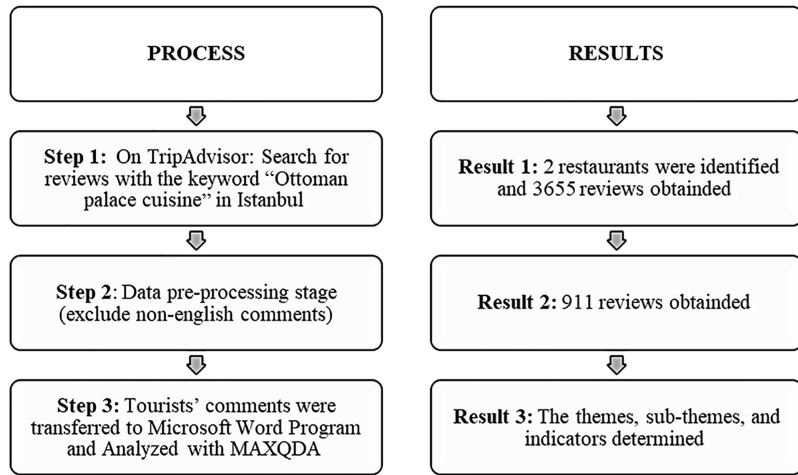of this process, the remaining 911 tourist reviews were included in the analysis (See Table 1 for details about tourists' nationality).

It was observed that most reviews were made by tourists coming from the USA (N = 82) and England (N = 80). When the reviews were evaluated in terms of continents, it was determined that 221 of them were from 32 countries in Europe, and 88 were from 24 countries in Asia. These two continents were followed by North America with 108 reviews from 6 different countries, Oceania with 27 reviews from 2 countries, Africa with 14 reviews from 4 different countries, and South America with 9 reviews from 4 different countries, respectively.

The content analysis of tourist reviews was performed using the MAXQDA program, which is frequently used in qualitative data analyses (Santos *et al.*, 2021). In the context of the content analysis, the coding process was applied by two coders. After the individual coding, the researchers of this study discussed the codes and compared them with the previously determined categories. Until a consensus was obtained, every disagreement was handled. This comparison and discussion process provided validity and reliability in the data analysis. The coding and discussion procedures allowed the classification of data into categories extensively and inclusively. Following several iterations, the researchers of this study achieved a consensus regarding the categories (Gursoy *et al.*, 2022).

After determining the Ottoman Palace Cuisine experience dimensions, the authors consulted several researchers with comprehensive knowledge about dining tourism experiences. A total of 30 categories (codes) occurred after this stage, and the authors discussed the main themes. Subsequently, seven themes were determined (See Figure 2).

| Visitor's region | Number of commets |
|---|---|
| Anonymous | 444 |
| Europe | 221 |
| North America | 108 |
| Asia | 88 |
| Oceania | 27 |
| Africa | 14 |
| South America | 9 |
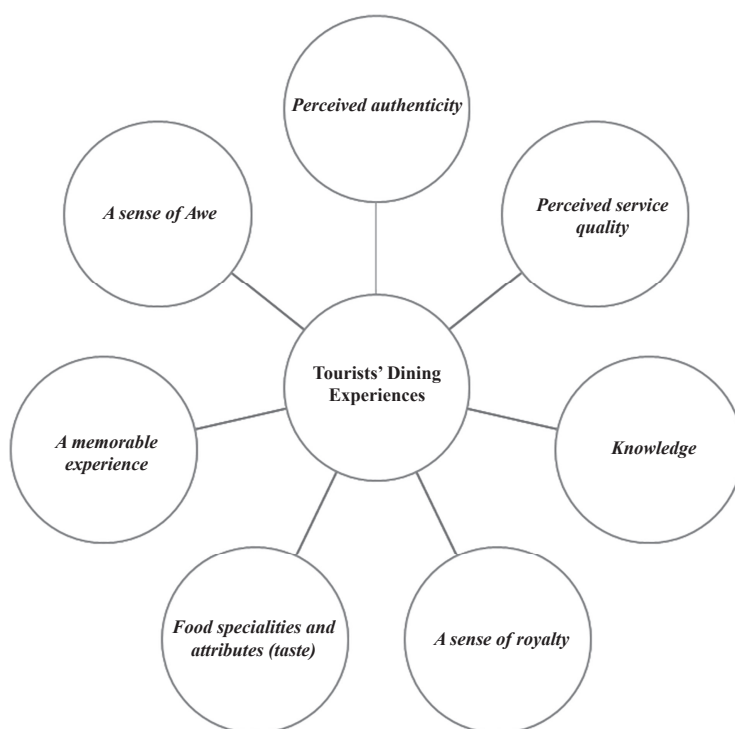
These themes (components) were put forward using pure quotes from tourist reviews and discussed to reinforce previous research findings (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b).

## Results

*Descriptive results*

In the context of the study, a total of 911 reviews of customers who visited two restaurants in Istanbul to taste Ottoman cuisine were analyzed. As a result of the analysis, the following components were determined: perceived authenticity, perceived service quality, knowledge, a sense of royalty, food specialties and attributes (taste), a memorable experience and a sense of Awe.

To ensure that the study data was up to date, the reviews written in the last five years were analyzed. It was observed that most of the reviews throughout the previous five years were written in 2019. The reason why the highest number of reviews were received in 2019 may be related to the record number of tourists who visited Istanbul that year. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has deeply affected the food and beverage and tourism industry in both Turkiye (Kesici and Uzunöz Altan, 2021) and the rest of the world in recent years (Jeong *et al.*, 2022). Thus, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the tourist flow decreased and the number of reviews regarding Ottoman Palace Cuisine was also decreased.

*Content analysis results*

Seven components of tourists' dining experiences in Ottoman Palace Cuisine were determined through the content analysis of online reviews (see Figure 2). The authors added original

tourist quotations for each component to provide validity and reliability of the findings (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a). Additionally, the dimensions were named by examining similar studies in the related literature.

*Perceived authenticity:* Authenticity is an attribute, a reflection of characteristics, or a current state of existence (Park *et al.*, 2019). It aims to portray tradition by establishing a probable link to the past (Seyitoglu, 2021; Zhang and Yin, 2020) and it is crucial for tourism products and services (Cinar *et al.*, 2022; Genc and Genc, 2022). Previous studies showed that perceived authenticity is a significant part of the tourists' food experiences (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b). Similarly, this study also revealed that perceived authenticity is one of the components of the tourists' food experiences. Some of the tourists described their authentic experiences as follows: "*The atmosphere was fun and authentic, including musicians playing from table to table and patrons dancing in the aisles. The food was exquisite-many 15th-century Ottoman dishes*" (R249- Anonymous). "*I am a chef and wanted to experience authentic cuisine*" (R492 from the United Arab Emirates).

*Perceived service quality:* Previous studies revealed that elements such as the taste, portion, freshness and presentation of the food all contribute to the customers' perceptions (Namkung and Jang, 2007). Maintaining cleanliness, price, location, service, atmosphere and menu diversity are essential for improving perceived service quality (Nemeschansky, 2020). As in previous tourist experience studies (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a), the findings of this study indicated that perceived service quality is one of the food experience of tourists. Some of the online reviews of tourists regarding perceived service quality are given below: "*High-quality food, Turkish and Ottoman recipes with a wide variety of dishes. All the dishes were wonderful and tasty*" (R250 from Spain). "*True Ottoman hi-quality food served with care in a relaxing atmosphere*" (R548 from Italy). "*I would have to say that I was amazed at the quality of food and service provided*" (R819 from Germany). Based on both the tourist reviews examined in this study and the findings of previous studies (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a), it can be said that service quality has an important place in the formation of tourist food experiences.

*Knowledge:* Knowledge-based learning is a cognitive component of the tourist experiences (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). As mentioned in previous food experience studies (e.g. Cifci *et al.*, 2022a), our study revealed that increasing knowledge is a component of the dining experiences. The followings are some tourist reviews highlighting this situation: "*It was an excellent experience to learn more about Ottoman/Turkish cuisine*" (R704, Anonymous). "*Having the opportunity to learn traditional Ottoman cuisine dishes from the master chef of this restaurant was a one-of-a-kind experience*" (R770 from Saudi Arabia). Because local food experiences provide travelers with the chance to learn about the background, customs and norms of local cuisine as well as its significance to the host culture, this possibility may serve as a significant motivation for some travelers to engage in local cuisine consumption (Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014).

*A Sense of Royalty:* Food experiences are also based on the emotions/feeling they generate in diners (Moral-Cuadra *et al.*, 2022). The findings of this study showed that the sense of royalty is a component of tourists' dining experiences in palace cuisine. In the examined reviews, the tourists described their emotions as follows: "*Feeling like Pasha*" (P487, from Anonymous). "*Feel yourself like Hurrem Sultan ... Ladies, if you'd like to feel like Hurrem-Sultan, give your man a card to this restaurant. This very tasty cuisine was reconstructed from the historic recipes of the Great Ottoman Empire! Classy interior and romantic atmosphere*" (R804 from Russia).

*A memorable experience:* Previous studies revealed that a memorable experience (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a; Seyitoglu, 2021) is a part of the tourists' food experiences. Tourists' memorable experiences encourage them to revisit (Barnes *et al.*, 2016). The findings of this study were also consistent with the findings of the previous studies. Regarding this, some reviews of the tourists were as follows: "*Truly unforgettable and great family experience. . . .. we have left*

*a piece of heart in Istanbul*" (R301 from Russia). "*It was an unforgettable day ... I look forward to visiting this place again and reliving the memories*" (R751 from Iraq). "*Unforgettable experience!*" (R804 from Russia). Such experiences may help increase the tourists' intentions to revisit gastronomic destinations (Atsiz and Seyitoglu, 2022). Thus, this type of experience is essential in terms of behavioral intention (revisiting and recommending to others).

*A sense of awe:* The awe component is what amazes travelers by surpassing their maximum expectations (Gursoy *et al.*, 2022). This study revealed that the sense of awe is another dimension of the dining experience. The findings related to this dimension showed that tourists assessed their dining experiences admiringly: "*Awesome tastes, absolutely fantastic foods, amazing place, great service, warm greetings ... we tried Ottoman palace foods. All of them are so nice and delicious. If you have a chance to go there, don't go back to your country before eating some special food*" (287, Anonymous). "*Awesome food. We had lunch here on our all-day walking tour through Istanbul. The food was excellen*t" (687 from Indonesia). Based on all tourist reviews examined in this study and the findings of previous studies in the tourist experience literature (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a), it can be said that awe has an important place in the formation of tourist food experiences.

*Food specialties and attributes (taste):* Another outstanding component highlighted by tourists in this study was food specialties and attributes. It was observed that tourists frequently remarked how gorgeous, delicious and unique the dishes were. Some of the reviews related to this issue are as follows: "*I had a pleasant dining experience with food of the most exquisite flavors*" (909, from Beirut). "*The food was nice based on historical recipes, the manager was very helpful, and he advised us on their menu*" (865, from Saudi Arabia). Based on these reviews and the findings of previous studies (Sthapit, 2017), it can be said that food specialties and attributes have an important place in the formation of tourist food experiences.

## Discussion and conclusion
### Conclusion
Although various studies have been conducted on the dining experience in the literature (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a, b; Ozcelik and Akova, 2021), the tourists' experiences with the palace cuisine have been ignored. The above-mentioned fact in the tourism literature encouraged the authors of the current study to investigate this issue. Thus, in this study, an answer to the question "which components constitute the dining experiences of tourists experiencing the palace cuisine" was sought. In this context, the reviews obtained from 911 tourists who were from various countries and visited Istanbul and experienced Ottoman Palace Cuisine were analyzed. A total of 7 components (*perceived authenticity, perceived service quality, knowledge, a sense of royalty, food specialties and attributes, a memorable experience* and *a sense of awe*) related to the experiences of tourists with the Ottoman Palace Cuisine concept of restaurants were determined as a result of the content analysis. The analysis results of this study revealed interesting insights that had not yet been obtained from previous research and which provided significant theoretical and practical implications.

Previous research has suggested that perceived authenticity is one of the main components of dining experiences (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022b; Ozdemir and Seyitoglu, 2017; Tsai and Lu, 2012). Similarly, this study identified it as an essential component of the palace cuisine experience. From this perspective, whether it is a palace cuisine or a local dining experience, the perception of authenticity emerges as a similar experience. Moreover, many countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, India and Singapore attract tourists from all over the world thanks to their authentic cuisine (Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn, 2017). The reason for this is that nowadays tourists seek out profound dining experiences with distinctive

dishes connected to the authenticity of the cuisine (Choi *et al.*, 2013). Thus, emphasizing authenticity in promoting a destination or restaurant can attract the attention of potential tourists.

In addition, the current research found that perceived service quality was another critical dimension of dining experiences in palace cuisine. In parallel with this, previous attempts also demonstrated that the dishes' taste, portion, freshness and presentation contributed to the customer's quality food perspective (Namkung and Jang, 2007). Likewise, Nemeschansky (2020) expressed that cleanliness, price, location, service, atmosphere and menu diversity are essential in forming perceived service quality. Thus, it can be suggested that destination practitioners and restaurant managers should pay attention to service quality and take steps to improve it.

Previous studies explored knowledge as an essential dimension of the food experience (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a; Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Similarly, this research found that knowledge is fundamental to the palace cuisine experiences. According to Tse and Crotts (2005), food tourists attach importance to learning something new and seek novelty in their experiences because they are cultural tourists. Based on this result, it can be said that including the knowledge of the history of dishes in the food menus of palace-concept restaurants can motivate and satisfy food tourists.

This study revealed that a sense of royalty is a component of tourists' palace cuisine experiences. This dimension distinguishes this study from other food experience studies. According to Kantarci *et al.* (2017), TV series increase curiosity about a culture and travel motivation toward the destination of that culture. For example, the Magnificent Century is one of the most popular Turkish TV series and has been exported to over 70 countries. The plot of the Magnificent Century is based on a historical drama lived in the 16th century and primarily focuses on the harem life and court politics of Suleiman the Magnificent (Ozalpman and Sarikakis, 2018). This TV series also portrays the life of Hurrem Sultan (Wife of Suleiman the Magnificent), who transformed from an enslaved person to a great queen (Zorlu, 2022). Considering the examined tourist comments, it can be assumed that the sense of royalty component discovered in this study arose as a result of the fact that series about Ottoman palace life, such as the Magnificent Century, affect tourists and their perceptions of food experiences. For example, a tourist from Russia expressed her experience as follows: "*Feel yourself like Hurrem Sultan.*" We noticed that tourists from the Balkan countries, Arab countries and Russia made such comments. These types of TV series have a severe audience in these countries.

It is clear from the tourism literature that a memorable experience is an essential component of the food experience (Seyitoglu, 2021). In terms of this issue, the results of this work support the current body of literature. However, this result is not surprising because Turkey has a rich culinary culture, and Istanbul is one of the most popular and famous destinations in Turkey (Seyitoglu, 2021). According to Seyfi *et al.* (2019), a memorable experience is vital for creating a long-term marketing strategy.

Previous studies have shown that awe is one of the predominant components of food experiences (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022c). Our results also revealed that a sense of awe is another dimension of the dining experience in palace cuisine. According to Coghlan *et al.* (2012), awe is the most intended output for restaurant managers since they desire their customers to be satisfied with their food or services. Moreover, Tian *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that a sense of awe created tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, this study also revealed that another essential dimension of tourists' experiences in palace cuisine is *food specialties and attributes*. This result is consistent with the existing literature. In many studies (e.g. Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a), it is shown that food specialties and attributes constitute tourist experiences. Based on this finding, it can be recommended that restaurants with the concept of palace cuisine should increase the food varieties and

strengthen the quality and presentation. Such arrangements will positively affect the tourists' experiences of palace cuisine.

## Theoretical implications

The current article has theoretical implications for the tourism literature in several ways. First, this study pioneers the understanding of the main components of the dining experiences of tourists in Ottoman palace cuisine, which is one of the under-researched areas in the tourism field. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge of the food experience literature. Second, even though some previous researchers have investigated the dining experiences of tourists, they could not focus specifically on the palace cuisine. Therefore, unlike other studies conducted on food experiences, this study focused specifically on the palace cuisine experiences of tourists. Third, although some of the tourist experience dimensions determined in this study were similar to those obtained in previous studies (Atsiz *et al.*, 2022a; Cifci *et al.*, 2022a), this study uncovered a new dimension called a sense of royalty. Thus, this finding may shed light on future studies related to food experiences. Fourth, many previous studies conducted with UGC have focused on street food and local food experiences (Cifci *et al.*, 2022a). Unlike these studies, the current study focused on tourists' dining experiences in Ottoman cuisine by using UGC. Hereby, UGC allowed us to determine the unexplored different dimensions of the dining experience.

## Practical implications

Regarding the practical contribution, it can be said that this study can enhance the knowledge of tourist service providers in Istanbul by identifying the components of palace cuisine dining experiences. In addition, this increasing level of knowledge will make a significant contribution to the tourism industry in Istanbul. Thanks to its rich and diverse cuisine, Istanbul has already positioned itself as one of the most important tourist destinations worldwide in terms of being the point of foreign tourist arrival (Cifci *et al.*, 2022b; Ozcelik and Akova, 2021). To be able to sustain this success, understanding the dining experiences of tourists visiting Istanbul is essential to improve the service quality.

This study also has significant implications for the palace concept restaurants. Firstly, the obtained results from this study can enhance the knowledge of service providers in terms of gastronomic destinations and palace-concept restaurants. They can improve their services based on the research findings to meet the expectations of tourists who come to experience the palace cuisine. For example, this study discovered that tourists feel like royalty when they experience such cuisines. Therefore, such restaurants and destinations can enhance the number of their advertisements and promotions prepared by taking into account the "sense of royalty" component. Moreover, restaurants with a palace cuisine concept can design their decorations authentically to provide a sense of royalty. The atmosphere, the decorations and the music should be convenient to the concept of Ottoman palace cuisine.

Secondly, in this study, it was discovered that tourists who experience such restaurants learn more about the culture and attach importance to obtaining information. Therefore, adding historical information about the dishes to the menus of restaurants can effectively meet customer expectations. Thirdly, based on the findings of this study, it can be recommended that such restaurants' personnel should also be informed about the history of the dishes so that they can contribute positively to tourists' experiences who want to increase their knowledge. Fourth, since the memorable experience is an essential dimension of the palace cuisine experience, palace concept restaurants should insist on creating an original atmosphere and menu including the unique Ottoman palace cuisine to provide memorable experiences.

*Limitations and future research*

Although this study contributes to our understanding of the dining experience by revealing components, it has certain limitations in generalization, like other qualitative research. First, this study was conducted exclusively at a single destination (Istanbul) and only-one cuisine (Ottoman Palace Cuisine). In future studies, research can be conducted on the dining experiences of tourists who tasted Ottoman Palace Cuisine in other destinations that served Ottoman Palace Foods, such as Edirne and Bursa, which were the capitals of the Ottoman Empire before Istanbul. Second, the approach used in this research was qualitative, and the data were analyzed using content analysis. Further research studies can employ a quantitative or mixed method and collect the data through a survey technique. Third, the data for this study were collected from a single platform known as TripAdvisor. In future studies, data can be collected from different digital travel platforms. Fourth, since this study is restricted to Ottoman Palace Cuisine, palace cuisines from other countries can be examined in future research, and the findings can be compared with those found in this study.

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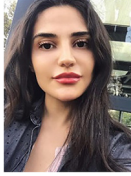
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