# Fusion Cuisine: A Study of Domestic Tourist's Perspectives in Malaysia

Azila Azmi[1, a], Muhammad Syaiful Amri Roslan[2, b], Hanani Ahmad Zubir[3, c], Nur Ilianis Adnan[4, c]

*[1, 2] Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang Branch, Permatang Pauh Campus, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

*[3 ,4] Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang Branch, Permatang Pauh Campus 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

*[a] Corresponding author,* Email: azila.azmi@uitm.edu.my
[b] Email: syaifulamri98@gmail.com
[c] Email: hanani.az@uitm.edu.my
[d] Email: nurilianis@uitm.edu.my

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Research on the prospects of fusion cuisine in Malaysia is currently scarce. Consequently, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the fusion cuisine from domestic tourists' perspectives while travelling in Malaysia.

**Design/Methodology/approach:** A qualitative data analysis strategy was employed. In-depth and semi-structured online interviews have been conducted with seven key individuals. A consent letter was given to the respondents before the interview. The interviews were conducted in Malay and data were recorded and transcribed into a written form. The respondents were national tourists randomly selected through social media accounts. The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data.

**Findings:** The research results showed three main themes, mainly the domestic tourists' understanding of Malaysian fusion cuisine, the food preferences of domestic tourists during the trip, and the views of domestic tourists on the transformation of the local cuisine. The results indicate that the attention of domestic tourists towards food innovation is related to food identity, health problems and its suitability as a proper strategy for tourism promotion in Malaysia.

**Research limitations:** This study is only focused on domestic tourists' perspectives, and due to that, the findings collected are specific as it focuses on domestic tourists and not international tourists or the different generations living in Malaysia. Further ahead, the method utilised to carry out this study is only qualitative; therefore, the sample size is very limited, which might not resemble the overall perspectives of domestic tourists towards fusion cuisine in Malaysia. Hence, the qualitative method may not obtain various findings just like the quantitative method does.

**Practical implications:** This research might possibly provide a clear vision and useful knowledge for producing better strategies to deal with the rapid yet uncontrollable emergence of fusion cuisine in Malaysia. This study is hoped to be effective in combating the movement of excessively renovated, redesigned, or overly modernised local heritage foods. The data and outcome from this research could also benefit all parties who are concerned about continuing the efforts to make local Malaysian foods recognised through creating and highlighting fusion cuisine in Malaysia.

**Originality/value:** Malaysian cuisine must be elevated to be up to par with the rest of the world's famous cuisine, and these responsibilities are on the government as well as the culinarians. These efforts can somehow promote and encourage tourists to visit Malaysia in the

future. The plans must be thoroughly formed, and this research hopefully will be a good start for the efforts in bringing the fusion cuisine in Malaysia to the world. Basically, by exploring the perspectives of domestic tourists towards fusion cuisine in Malaysia, it is believed to benefit the government and the culinarians in refining the food serving process to look more presentable and improving the taste of the foods to suit local and international delicacies.

**Keywords:** Fusion Cuisine; Perceptions; Domestic Tourist; Malaysia.

## 1 Introduction

The food consumed in the West and the Eastern worlds uniquely differ. Almost all groups of people worldwide have a unique food culture, reflecting their ethnic, social and cultural origin (Tamang et al., 2020). Over time, the Westerners' migration to the East has made Western-style food an increasingly popular dining option, often reinvented and modified to suit Eastern tastes. Eastern and Western food or "fusion cuisine" can be easily understood as the fusion of authentic local food with western elements to create a new unique taste while retaining the unique elements, ensuring the taste local does not become strange. Sarioglan (2014) highlighted that many social changes caused by technological progress, industrialisation and urbanisation had been observed in the present time. Besides these changes, the food culture and eating patterns have also changed. Therefore, the current research examines fusion cuisine from Malaysia's domestic tourists' perspectives to fill this gap. Presently, people can now observe the uncontrolled irruption of fusion cuisine in the market, not only in famous fast-food restaurants but also in so-called "trendy" cafes and instant products sold in the supermarkets. This trend has become a phenomenon. For example, McDonald's in Malaysia introduced Cendol and Gula Melaka McFlurry, Burger Nasi Lemak and other additions to the menu by introducing some western elements to Malaysian food.

As time passes, ethnic cuisine may be forgotten for various reasons, such as the lack of chefs and tourists' knowledge of this unique cuisine. Malaysia should take advantage of the uniqueness and diversity of Malaysian cuisine to become a famous and prestigious food tourism destination in Asia. However, a key question remains underexplored. Every tourist whether a domestic tourist from Malaysia or an international tourist, must consume and consider local cuisine. Thus, how will they view and judge local cuisines and their views on behaviour? (Ab. Karim et al., 2009).

Spence (2018) explained that fusion cuisine seems to be a popular hype these days, but how can this statement be explained perfectly? Although fusion cuisine has recently appeared in the gastronomic media and is very popular, it is an entirely contemporary phenomenon. In fact, in the long run, fusion cuisine will soon prove that most foods consumed today reflect a mix of ingredients, flavours, elements, recipes, food trends and philosophies, creating the much-loved fusion cuisines. The emergence of fusion cuisine in the market is currently observed in fast-food restaurants, "trendy" cafes, and instant products. Unfortunately, Aziz and Pawi (2017) denoted that Malaysian food has lost many cultural characteristics. The innovative efforts of improvising traditional food may be the reason behind these concerns. Malaysians are now concerned that their culinary traditions and heritage will be portrayed negatively.

Simultaneously, it is believed that highlighting the unique identity of Malaysian cuisine is still weak in promoting the uniqueness of Malaysia's cultural heritage food. According to Yoshino (2010), some theories suggest that Malaysian food is challenging to spread internationally due to its home cooking. The Malays have not yet begun devising any specific method to distribute Malaysian food in a commercial environment. The public label it as "ethnic cuisine" (Aziz & Pawi, 2017). Thus, this situation may be related to the rapid and large-scale emergence of

fusion dishes in Malaysia. Although this trend spreads rapidly and uncontrollably, whether people who eat fusion food enjoy modern traditional foods remains unknown. Modernised Malaysian traditional foods or fusion dishes have caused controversial disputes between researchers and consumers because they are highly related to protecting the identity and authenticity of local traditional foods.

In addition, research and analysis regarding fusion cuisine has extensively been studied in several countries such as Taiwan (Wang, 2022), Turkey (Akyürek, 2019), Pakistan (Ali et al., 2019), the United Kingdom (Spence, 2018), Bangladesh (Al-Ferdous, 2017), Singapore (Gauri & Sherkar, 2016), Australia (Mohr & Hosen, 2013). Ironically, some studies indicated that fusion dishes could turn into "chaotic" dishes (Spence, 2018). Similar research related to fusion cuisine was conducted in the Malaysian environment and focused on gastronomic tourism (Sanip et al., 2022; Jalis et al., 2014), customer satisfaction (Kunasegaran, 2019), culinary innovation (Aziz & Pawi, 2017), national heritage foods (Mat Som et al., 2019) and food characteristics (Ab. Karim et al., 2009). There is almost absent research has been undertaken on fusion cuisine from the perspective of national tourists in Malaysia. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the domestic tourists' perspectives towards fusion cuisine in Malaysia.

This study is organized as follow. The next section reviews the existing literature regarding Malaysia fusion cuisine from the perspective of tourism industry. Section 3 details the study methodology, and Section 4 reports the study results and data analysis. Lastly, section 5 and 6 summarises the study findings and outline the implications of the research.

## 2 Literature Review
### 2.1 Malaysia's Tourism Industry

Malaysia offers cultural attractions and a wide range of islands, national parks and tropical rainforests, with multicultural audiences and scenic beauty. In addition, convenient transportation and tropical climate make Malaysia a preferred tourism destination. The Malaysian tourism industry is managed by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. The Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB), commonly known as Tourism Malaysia, is focused on promoting Malaysia domestically and internationally (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). Malaysia is a diverse country with many different races, cultures and religions. Generally, the individuals of each culture maintain their ancestors' ethnic traditions. Therefore, the Malaysian culture incorporates a great deal of culture, beliefs and principles. Malaysia's multicultural population comprises three main races: Malays, Chinese, Indians, and many other ethnic groups (indigenous peoples) living primarily in the rural areas. Due to its cultural diversity, Malaysia has become a melting pot of the food heritage of different ethnic groups. Today, food is an integral part of the excitement brought by the tourism experience and can contribute to the tourism industry. Various food choices can attract foreign tourists looking for new culinary experiences, especially food lovers who enjoy slightly fused flavours (Soderstrom, 2022).

The harmonious relationship between nations has led to the fusion of various ingredients and unique culinary products, from mild to spicy and hot, from simple to sweet, covering multiple flavours (Sanip & Mustapha, 2020). This uniqueness has long encouraged many foreign tourists to visit Malaysia to experience food and culinary tourism. Raja Abdullah and Isa (2020) explained culinary tourism as one of the most prominent niche tourism markets. Many tourism researchers view the success of food tourism as a soft power approach. This market segment is a part of the cultural and ecotourism market. Since Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, Malaysian food integrates flavours from all races and offers its own uniqueness. Each Malaysian state has its own dishes, and some dishes may differ from other states.

## 2.2 Cuisine in Malaysia

According to Yoshino (2010), Malaysian cuisine originates from the diversity of cuisines in Malaysian multicultural society, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, Nyonyas and others. Several Malaysian favourites include nasi lemak, rendang beef, char siew, curry laksa, roti canai and others. The Malays are acknowledged as descendants of primitive Malays, mixed with Indians, Thais, Arabs, and Chinese. Thus, the Malays are influenced by unique traditions and cultures such as Indian, Thai, Javanese, Sumatra and other Malaysian cultures. They have built the Malay food culture with important regional differences (Yoshino, 2010). One of the true origins, the most famous Malaysian food, is the nasi lemak. Nasi lemak is a kind of rice cooked in coconut milk and served with sambal sauce, anchovies, thinly sliced cucumber, boiled eggs and grilled peanuts. The dish is usually wrapped in a pyramid shape with fresh banana leaves (Hutton & Tettoni, 2005).

Also, most Chinese are workers in the south, and some have become small merchants or handicraftsmen. Originating from different provinces, the Chinese brought their traditions, culture, knowledge and food. The essential ingredients are often noodles, tofu, and soy sauce. Malaysian Chinese cuisine incorporates several of Malaysia's most popular spices, such as cinnamon sticks and star anise, into traditional Chinese dishes (Hutton &Tettoni, 2005). Historically Indian merchants and workers entered the country en masse when the British controlled the Malay Peninsula in the 19th century. Resultantly, today, Indian food has been "Malaysianised", and a unique version of Indian food that is not common in India has been created. Presently, not only do many Indian restaurants serve "authentic" North and South Indian cuisine, but Muslim Indian street vendors and restaurants offer a fascinating cross-section of the Malaysian culinary landscape. The locals familiarly call them "Mamak", typically referring to nasi kandar stalls or Indian Muslim food restaurants, a culinary fusion of Indian and Malay cooking patterns.

## 2.3 Fusion Cuisine in Malaysia

Hairon et al. (2017) discussed the development of Malaysian food culture. The author refers to development as modification, adjustment, or improvement. In this emerging sense of multiple modernities, food culture can be regarded as a cultural landscape of culinary versatility. Social independence provides new methods for reshaping social and cultural identities. Lee (2017) explained in multiple concepts that the inherent diversity principle means this versatility results from inevitable mixing and a transparency state, ignoring predictability or specific formulas. This process is a continuous creolisation process that allows new and different cultures to occur. Among all forms of modernity, the stages of differentiation, creativity, and globalisation are critical components of the evolving food culture. The crucial part is to address the possible ways these developments are reshaping Malaysia's identity and preferences as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural country in Southeast Asia.

Based on modern food types and related possibilities of food marketing and experimentation, some people will consider fusion cuisine from a contemporary perspective (Geiling, 2013). However, fusion cuisine is one of the most apparent effects of cultural fusion. Among the types of fusion cuisine offered in Malaysia, some currently available food trends are widely known as fad foods. In addition to fusion and molecular gastronomy, trendy food is one of the last food cultures to emerge from innovation (Khaled, 2012; Cronin et al., 2014).

Hipster food is also affected by cultural transmission (Hairon et al., 2017). Torre and Scarborough (2017) described cultural communication as a systemic mechanism in which cultural and social practice elements are dispersed from one community or social group to another or social changes that occur through this mechanism. Thoughts, beliefs, principles, knowledge, habits, attitudes, objects, and symbols are assigned through communication. By

understanding these terms, conclusively, trendy food is also considered part of the fusion cuisine locally available in Malaysia (Hairon et al., 2017). Examples of hipster foods include trendy burgers, sushi wraps, zucchini pasta, fancy salads, doughnuts, fruit rings, and weird milkshakes (Hairon et al., 2017) and most generation Z in Malaysia prefer to purchase the trendy and hipster food (Ling et al., 2022). The emergence of these foods is related to the way of eating, cooking techniques, ingredients used and consumption habits.

## 2.4 Fusion Cuisine and Sustainability of Gastronomic Tourism in Malaysia

Chang et al. (2011) stated that many destination marketers now use food as a source of new articles and plans to encourage tourists to visit a country. As far as gastronomy is concerned, gastronomic tourism is vital in sustainable tourism (Scarpato, 2003). According to Scarpato (2000), sustainable gastronomy means that the society will develop socially and economically while maintaining an economic commitment to protecting the environment and the best health of community members. In this case, the interaction between food tourism providers, such as local food producers, who prepare environmentally sustainable and nutritious local food for the body and mind of tourists, will establish a system that represents food sustainability. As mentioned by Zainal et al. (2010), encouraging local delicacies to enter the world market not only improves the country's reputation and credibility but also attracts tourists' attention to experience the local cuisine. In addition, a high degree of consideration and commitment must be given to maintaining a country's food tourism, especially local cuisine, because it is closely related to food preparation methods, dishes and etiquette (Ramli et al., 2016).

Visitors can develop their understanding of local cuisine by enjoying what the locals do and trying new dishes and cuisines that they or their friends are unlikely to find at home (Fields, 2003). In general, tourism restoration can be considered a "peak tourist" experience, not just a "supportive" experience (Quan & Wang, 2004), but plays a crucial role in influencing the way tourists experience the destination (Kivela & Crotts, 2006), either gastronomic tourism or non-food tourism. Although many attractions have gradually promoted travel dining experiences and local cuisines as a combined "attraction" (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Stewart et al., 2008), concerns emerge about how one of its aspects can become an "obstacle", preventing tourists from visiting a specific destination.

## 3 Methodology

This research utilised semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from participants of various target groups and entities (such as domestic tourists). A qualitative research method was chosen because qualitative methods are instrumental in discovering the meaning of people's experiences they encounter (Merriam, 1998). If internally and externally accurate and credible, then qualitative research is promising. Thus, the findings can be defended and obtained through a comprehensive and documented process. Phenomenological methods will be mainly used to explain how participants understand the studied phenomenon, in this case, domestic tourists' views on Malaysian fusion cuisine.

Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 participants for phenomenological research, while Morse (1994) recommends six participants. Therefore, this study interviewed seven participants who were willing to share their experiences because phenomenological research needs to record the participants' responses in the interview based on their life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Purpose sampling was used alongside semi-structured interviews and systematic and parallel data collection and analysis procedures. National tourists (25-43 years old) were selected as research subjects. Nevertheless, selecting and interviewing international tourists due to the limited number of tourists in Malaysia during the Covid-19 pandemic is unpractical.

This research was open to any national tourist with knowledge about fusion cuisine. Participants were selected based on their experience travelling within Malaysia. First, the selected participant can be anyone and must be a Malaysian citizen. Since the Covid-19 outbreak has affected the domestic tourism industry, participants were only asked about their travel experience before the pandemic. Several interview questions were asked to collect the data needed for the research findings. In order to encourage participants to make contributions through oral comments, the researchers asked exploratory questions to help them answer interview questions effectively. Therefore, seven insiders were randomly selected by using purposed sampling. They were mainly from Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, and Johor. The choice of insider information is regardless of gender. According to Berg (2004), in a qualitative study, five to 20 people are considered sufficient and provide reliable and consistent data. Therefore, seven national tourists were selected for this study.

The data collection and analysis activities of this research phase were linked in detail concurrently, as they were presented separately for clarification. Therefore, the primary data sources of this study were various interviews and field notes. Participants were interviewed as informants in this study, which meant they provided important information triggered by a series of questions. In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected to extract more information from the interviewees by expanding the questions raised by the researchers spontaneously. This method is essential to obtain as much input as possible and help form strong conclusions. The interviews were audio or screen-recorded to prepare a complete transcript with the participants' consent. The transcriptions ensured that the information received and collected could be reviewed when necessary to avoid overlooking the input. During the interviews, written notes were taken to allow researchers to record key points for later reference and utilisation in data analysis.

Field notes were used in this research. After each interview, field notes were entered, analysed and compared with the recorded interview (Maxwell, 2005). The format of these field notes is based on the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (1982). The researchers recorded the date and time on the first page of each group of notes. They included a job title to show the content of the discussion in the notes. Some themes of the on-site notes included how the informant's attitude is reflected in his words and direct quotations that caught the researchers' attention.

This research was analysed through thematic data analysis. The data analysis was undertaken in three steps. Initially, interview records were checked multiple times, looking for "recurring patterns" (Merriam, 1998). The researchers emphasised quotes and words related to interview analysis. Besides, they utilised thematic data analysis to switch back and forth between the transcripts. The researchers named these categories, coded the transcripts, and placed the parts representing each category in a category folder (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Merriam, 1998). Second, the researchers collected encrypted interviews and on-site notes and examined the correlations within or between the data sources. When tentative categories appear, researchers evaluate the categories based on data (Merriam, 1998). Finally, the researchers merged and refined the categories before determining the answer (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## 4 Results

The interview was conducted through the online platform Google Meet, enabling a face-to-face interview. All the seven domestic tourists, accounting for 71% (n = 5) domestic male tourists and the remaining 29% (n = 2) were domestic female tourists, voluntarily accepted the interview invitation for this study. The interviewees were contacted and selected based on their free time and willingness to participate in the interviews. In most cases, they were connected through social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. The respondents hailed from various

Malaysian states, such as Kedah, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Sarawak and Kuala Lumpur. The interviewees expressed their views on Malaysian fusion cuisine, respectively.

Table 1 shows that 43% (n = 3) of the respondents were between 30 and 39 years old, followed by 29% (n = 3) aged 20-29 and 40-49 years old, respectively. Most respondents were from Kedah, representing 43% (n = 3) and one each from Johor, Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur and Negeri Sembilan. According to the data obtained, the respondents can be divided into four categories. The first category is the educational environment (29%, n = 2), where one student and one teacher were included in the sample. The second category involved media-related jobs (29%, n = 2), such as "television programme producer" and "senior producer". The third category represented content creators (29%, n = 2), namely "brand and content strategists" and "full-time YouTubers". Finally, one respondent worked in the dentistry field, representing 14% of the sample (n = 1). The details of the interviewees are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

| Demographic | | No of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 5 | 71 |
| | Female | 2 | 29 |
| **Age** | 20-29 | 2 | 29 |
| | 30-39 | 3 | 43 |
| | 40-49 | 2 | 29 |
| **Origin** | Kedah | 3 | 43 |
| | Kuala Lumpur | 1 | 14 |
| | Negeri Sembilan | 1 | 14 |
| | Johor | 1 | 14 |
| | Sarawak | 1 | 14 |
| **Background of Occupation** | Education | 2 | 29 |
| | Mass media | 2 | 29 |
| | Content creator | 2 | 29 |
| | Dentistry | 1 | 14 |

### 4.1 Domestic Tourists' Knowledge of Fusion Cuisine in Malaysia

The definition of fusion cuisine and examples of fusion cuisine were chosen as the theme. This theme refers to the interview question "How well do you know fusion cuisine?" followed by probing questions to gauge their perspectives of fusion cuisine. All respondents (100%, n = 7) believed that they have knowledge related to fusion cuisine in Malaysia, whether from their readings, research or experiences. Table 2 identifies the theme and the sub-theme of domestic tourists' knowledge of fusion cuisine in Malaysia.

### 4.2 Definition of Fusion Cuisine in Malaysia

This theme refers to the primary research objective to explore the domestic tourists' perspectives towards fusion cuisine in Malaysia. This theme is based on the question probing, "How do you define fusion cuisine?" The first theme identified in this study is the domestic tourists' knowledge of fusion cuisine, followed by the first highlighted sub-theme, namely the definition of fusion cuisine understood by them. Among the seven respondents, some provided different interpretations and understandings related to fusion cuisine, resulting in numerous responses to the interview questions.

Table 2: The theme for domestic tourists' knowledge on fusion cuisine in Malaysia

| Theme | Sub-theme | No of response | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Definition of fusion cuisine | Combination of foods | 4 | 57 |
| | Twisted foods | 2 | 29 |
| | Adapt to the local taste | 2 | 29 |
| | Innovated and modernised | 1 | 14 |
| | Unique and different | 1 | 14 |
| | Improvement | 1 | 14 |
| Example of fusion cuisine in Malaysia | Local dishes | 4 | 57 |
| | Desserts | 4 | 57 |
| | Pasta dishes | 3 | 43 |
| | Burger | 2 | 29 |
| | Steak | 1 | 14 |
| Differences between fusion cuisine and local cuisine | Additional elements | 3 | 43 |
| | Taste and flavours | 3 | 43 |
| | Choice of ingredients | 3 | 43 |
| | Advertising and information | 2 | 29 |
| | Method of cooking | 1 | 14 |

Four of the seven respondents believed that fusion cuisine is related to food combinations. Besides, two of them stated that fusion cuisine could also be defined as twisted foods. Another sub-theme indicated that the definition of fusion cuisine pinpoints to outside foods that are more likely adjusted to adapt to the local taste. The sub-theme was agreed upon by two informants. On the contrary, the sub-themes defining the fusion cuisine as innovated and modernised foods, unique and different foods, and a sign of improvement were only defined by one informant each. Some responses related to the definition of fusion cuisine from the domestic tourists' perspectives as per the informants responses are as follows:

*"Fusion cuisine is original food combined with new foods for the purpose of improvement when we combine Malay food with western food. Fusion cuisine symbolises change over time. We are now in a much better era than before showcasing the improvements and changes experienced." (Respondent 6)*

*"Fusion food usually is not straight forward and has its uniqueness, it is like a local cuisine that has a hint of maybe different cooking method and ingredients used and from where those ingredients are originated to combine it all up becoming a food." (Respondent 5)*

*"Fusion food is a food that is innovated from the original recipe, mainly the famous traditional foods for some races and ethnics that is modernised and twisted but still they remain the important ingredients even though it does not look the same as the authentic anymore whereby the presentation of the food has been changed." (Respondent 2)*

*"The authentic foods that have been improved or twisted to become something new and to suit nowadays' preferred taste and palate." (Respondent 1)*

### 4.3 Example of Fusion Cuisine in Malaysia

The next theme highlighted throughout this data analysis is the example of fusion cuisine in Malaysia from domestic tourists' perspectives. This theme refers to the probing question, "Can you give an example of fusion cuisine?" Various examples were shared during the interview session. Instead of jotting down each food name or menu, the researchers classified the food into simpler groups, namely local dishes such as westernised, desserts, pasta dishes, burgers, and steaks. Five examples obtained for the westernised local dishes based on the interview include Laksa Johor with spaghetti, Pisang Goreng with grated cheese, Keropok Lekor with

cheese sauce, and Asam Laksa served dry. Similarly, five examples of desserts believed to be fusion by them were also recorded. The desserts were Nasi Lemak ice cream, Sirap Bandung cupcakes and Durian cake. Additionally, pasta dishes were also shared as examples of Malaysian fusion cuisine by three informants. The dishes mentioned were Rendang spaghetti, Laksa spaghetti and Spaghetti with Masak Lemak Itik Salai. Two informants gave examples of burgers such as Nasi Lemak burger and Salted Egg Butter Chicken burger. In contrast, only one informant used steaks as an example of fusion cuisine, namely steaks served with local sauce like Asam Pedas or Asam Laksa. Some of the respondents' views regarding the example of fusion cuisine found in Malaysia are as follows:

*"Laksa Johor, 'laksa putih' (rice laksa) is replaced by the spaghetti, 'burger nasi lemak', 'pisang goreng cheese'."(Respondent 1)*

*"I have tasted Asam Laksa the dry version, nasi lemak ice cream."(Respondent 3)*

*"There are also some chefs who serve Western food like steaks with local sauce such as Asam Pedas, Masak Lemak Cili Api, Asam Laksa. Sometimes steaks are also marinated with Asian herbs or spices such as for example, curry spices." (Respondent 7)*

*"Spaghetti with Masak Lemak Itik Salai, 'nasi lemak ice cream', durian cake." (Respondent 6)*

*"Italian food that is Malaysianised, maybe Spaghetti Laksa, Salted Egg Butter Chicken Burger, Spaghetti Rendang, Sirap Bandung Cupcakes, Infused Teh Tarik Cake, and Pandan Gula Melaka Cake." (Respondent 5)*

## 4.4 Differences between Fusion Cuisine and Local Cuisine

This theme refers to the interview question, "How do you identify the differences between local cuisine and fusion cuisine?" The themes identify how the domestic tourists provide their perspectives regarding the differences between authentic local cuisines and fusion cuisines they found. The opinion on how these cuisines differ was also recorded. According to the data, three informants differentiated the fusion from the authentic local cuisine by combining the additional elements with the main dishes. Similar to the theme above that highlights the example of fusion cuisines, one example explaining this sub-theme is the steak dish served with local sauce, such as Asam Pedas. Logically, one could tell the differences by merely observing the composition of the foods served to them if they are aware of the changes. Likewise, three informants agreed that the taste and flavours might indicate clear differences between fusion cuisine and local cuisine, while three other informants shared similar viewpoints. They believed they could differentiate the cuisines from the choice of ingredients used in the dishes. Besides, two informants agreed that they could differentiate between fusion and local cuisine after receiving vital information related to the dishes served or from advertisements. Hence, some of the supporting statements are as follows:

*"Based on my experience, I observed what are their staple foods, then what they usually add that is not what they routinely and basically consume. The KFC in Brazil serves their fried chicken with rice and black bean gravy. The things that differentiate fusion foods with the others is that the fusion foods have additional element inside to make it look much more premium and fancier." (Respondent 2)*

*"The difference is in terms of taste we can differentiate it. The difference is also in terms of the information we receive from people regarding the food served." (Respondent 7)*

*"I know the substitution of ingredients in the food that subsequently changes how it tastes." (Respondent 5)*

*"The difference is in the name (combination of Malay and English words e.g.: Nasi Goreng Lamb Grill), differences in the ingredients used in the two dishes." (Respondent 4)*

*"Marketing and advertising, the foods are changed by adding some new elements or maybe the foods are improvised the way we never saw, the way of cooking." (Respondent 1)*

In a nutshell, based on all the themes derived, the informants have a clear understanding of fusion cuisine in Malaysia. They managed to briefly explain the definition of fusion cuisine from their perspectives without contradicting how the scholars define it. Indeed, the highlighted sub-theme also resembled how clearly they understood fusion cuisine in Malaysia merely by observing as they provided examples of fusion cuisine they have experienced. The informants could tell the differences between fusion and authentic local cuisines in their own respective ways.

### 4.5 Domestic Tourists' Food Preferences during Travel

The informants were asked about their food preferences during travels in the interview sessions. This theme refers to the interview question, "When you travel domestically, do you like to choose fusion cuisine or authentic local cuisine?" This question evaluated their perspectives on which cuisine or types of foods they favour while travelling. Interestingly, the findings indicated that most informants prefer authentic local food while travelling inside Malaysia instead of fusion cuisine. Five of them preferred authentic local cuisines, while the remaining two informants preferred both. Nevertheless, the two informants who prefer both prioritised tasting authentic local cuisines before enjoying the fusion cuisine offered.

### 4.6 Justification on Domestic Tourists' Food Preferences during Travel

This theme refers to the interview question, "Why do you choose fusion cuisine/local cuisine?" The informants have expressed their justification for their food preferences during travels. Each of them reacted differently. Nevertheless, some of them shared similar thoughts related to their food preferences. Four informants considered enjoying and experiencing the identities and cultures while travelling inside Malaysia. They do not want to waste the chances of trying authentic foods which are limited and exclusive only at a specific destination. Some of them also preferred looking for cuisines that the locals are proud of, reflecting their identity and culture. On the other hand, two informants preferred tasting the authenticity of local cuisine while being concerned with the loss of authenticity due to the event of reinvention where authentic local cuisines are becoming fusion cuisines. Furthermore, one informant felt that authentic foods and fusion cuisines could bring back nostalgia to the consumer. In contrast, another informant said that he loved to challenge his palate with different tastes of foods. Below are some of the commentaries related to the earlier justification.

*"For me, if the food is innovative, then its authenticity will be lost. It is not wrong to combine our food with food from abroad, but not all foods are suitable to match. Therefore, fusion food must be added with ingredients that taste almost the same, so that the food is not fed up, easy to swallow and acceptable to the public." (Respondent 6)*

*"I prefer the authentic food served at the tourist spot because it reflects the identity and culture of the people of the place. If fusion food, the identity of the food has changed a lot." (Respondent 7)*

*"The taste of authentic foods is still maintained, the production of the foods is also still maintained, and when we travel at certain places, we don't always get the chances for us to*

*taste the authentic foods originated from the states made by local people (rarely get the chance)." (Respondent 1)*

*"I will look for which dishes that the local people usually make and proud of." (Respondent 2)*
*"Whenever I go to new places, I want to taste the local foods, but if I find something new like fusion, I still want to try it but after I have tasted the original one. Usually, I like to challenge my palate because I love to taste the difference. I like to be adventurous with my foods, more likely related to fusion foods. I will try both to know their flavour profiles. Because sometimes I know what is inside the menu originally, but what makes the other cooks substitute it making the new reinvented recipe." (Respondent 5)*

*"Not a fan of fusion cuisine unless the food has an interesting story behind it. Every time when we travel, the local authentic food can only be found there and not any places else. For me, when the fusion food can create nostalgia when people eat it, it surely will attract me to try them all." (Respondent 3)*

**4.7 Comparison of Food Attraction between Fusion Cuisine and Local Cuisine**
Significant differences exist between food preferences and food attraction. Hence, this theme refers to the interview question, "Which food attracts you the most? Local cuisine or fusion cuisine?" Ironically, when food is attractive, one will prefer not necessarily eat them. Thus, the informants were asked whether fusion cuisine or local cuisine attract them more when both are offered for this theme. For instance, the researchers gave an example of fusion cuisine, such as Sate Burger, with another example of local cuisine, the original sate. The findings indicated that four respondents perceived that fusion cuisine would attract them more than authentic local cuisine among all the informants. In contrast, the remaining three informants answered that authentic local cuisine would attract them more than fusion cuisine for personal reasons. The comparison of food attraction between fusion cuisine and local cuisine among domestic tourists stated by the respondents are as follows:

*"The choice is depending on the ingredients in the menu if it has my favourite (ginger torch, basil leaves, kesum leaves, protein like beef etc.). Nevertheless, if the two choices of foods contain the same ingredients, fusion food will attract me to try it first because it is different from what I have tasted. It's an invention that maybe nobody ever tried to make it for me." (Respondent 5)*

*"For me, it must be fusion food because we already know the taste of original food that is usually eaten. For example, when the authentic sate is made into a sate burger, we may wonder how the dish is prepared." (Respondent 6)*

*"Usually, fusion food will appeal to me more because the food is a bit weird for me. So, it will attract our attention to try because we are used to finding original food like nasi lemak everywhere. But new things like this fusion food we have never encountered, so the feeling of keening to try it will arise in me." (Respondent 4)*

*"I prefer to try the fusion because if the restaurant offers fusion food that the other restaurants do not sell, why they are so brave to sell those fusion foods to the local people?" (Respondent 2)*

*"When travelling, I prefer local cuisine because I won't try it and I don't have interest in trying it (fusion food)." (Respondent 1)*

*"Local cuisine. I will only eat the fusion food if there is no authentic one at that place, maybe if the whole destination is not selling that authentic food anymore. If the fusion food is the last made available as the original one is already extinct, I will try the fusion." (Respondent 3)*

*"I prefer authentic food. If it is fusion food, the original element has been replaced with a new element. I am okay with these two foods, but I am more interested in trying the original because instead of the original, we can taste the next creation. I will taste the original food first, then I will try the fusion meal, from there I will know where this flavour comes from." (Respondent 7)*

As referred to the themes above, most domestic tourists prefer to have authentic local cuisines while travelling inside Malaysia instead of fusion cuisines. Many reasons contribute to why they prefer authentic local cuisines. After the theme was thoroughly analysed, most of them were keener to experience the local identity and culture, which differed from where they originated. The domestic tourists also perceived that they should embrace the authenticity of local foods before the cuisine is reinvented into something new that could be worse. Conversely, despite the preferences of domestic tourists in prioritising local cuisine than fusion cuisine, the condition has slightly changed concerning which cuisine attracts them. Four informants, or 57% of the informants, believed that fusion cuisines would be more attractive if they were served with both fusion and local cuisines for their uniqueness and new touch. Their curiosity to know what is new on the plate will make their desire arise whenever they feel attracted to the fusion cuisine.

### 4.8 Domestic Tourists' Opinion on the Reinvention of Local Cuisine

The informants were asked about the reinvention of local cuisine towards the end of the interview session. This theme refers to the interview question, "Do you agree local food be reinvented into fusion cuisine? Why?" The reinvention indicates expecting the authentic local cuisines to be innovated into a new fusion cuisine, regardless of any adjustments made to the dishes. According to the data obtained, two informants agreed on the reinvention while two disagreed. On the other hand, the remaining three informants partially agreed on the reinvention of local cuisines. All of them agreed or disagreed or partially agreed for their own reasons and justifications.

Two informants who agreed that local cuisines could be reinvented into fusion cuisines opined that the fusion cuisine could help in adapting foreigners' palates while visiting Malaysia. Foreigners are well-known not to be spicy-food fans, similar to how Malaysians enjoy local dishes. Certain conditions must be fulfilled before selling fusion cuisines to consumers. First, the innovation should be experimented with ideally without overdoing it to avoid the cuisine tasting worse than the original. The two informants' justifications who agreed with the reinvention of local cuisines into fusion cuisines are as follows:

*"I don't have any problem, I'm okay with it and I agree with this improvised local food to be highlighted and popularised to people outside there as we could help the foreigners' palate to be adaptable while visiting Malaysia, less spicy and less fishy." (Respondent 1)*

*"I agree that if the effort to renew the original food is continued on the condition that the food should be experimented and the recipe should be set before they sell the dish, not just sell without studying and experimenting first. I agree because I think that there are many chefs who*

*are capable and have the skill to change something that makes food tastier and better."* *(Respondent 5)*

On the contrary, two informants disagreed with the reinvention of the local cuisine into fusion cuisine. Their objections primarily concerned the long-term effect towards the authentic food identity and its original existence and the rising health issues due to the ridiculous add-ons which eventually make the food unhealthy to be consumed. The two informants' justifications who disagreed with the reinvention of local cuisine into fusion cuisine are included below:

*"Our creativity to invent or recreate original recipe should be redirected, we should create new menu then if we have that creativity. I personally disagree as for long term effect; it will diminish the food identity and even the existence of the authentic cuisine."* *(Respondent 3)*

*"Because we may create an unhealthy society due to this fusion food. As of now, everything we want is fast. So, the goodness that should be in the food will be lost. But for me, it is not wrong for us to work on fusion food but do not create ridiculous foods that can interfere with our health. Obviously, we cannot always stick with the old. At the very least, we must follow the passage of time as the world is now getting more and more advanced."* *(Respondent 6)*

Lastly, three informants partially agreed with the reinvention of local cuisines into fusion cuisines. The researchers observed that the informants' pattern of answers stressed the advantages and disadvantages. One informant said the idea depended on where the foods will be served. The other informant was concerned about the probability of losing food identity, although he still believed that innovation could make food much more enjoyable. Additionally, the last informant believed that reinventing or recreating a local cuisine to give a new touch might act as a form of promotion for Malaysia tourism while simultaneously preserving Malaysian identity to make it balanced and worthwhile. Hence, the three informants' justifications are as follows:

*"It depends on where the foods will be served. For example, if the hawkers want to sell fusion food, for me it is okay because they want to explore and offer more choice for customers, to attract new customers or maintain regular customers. For me it is inappropriate to serve fusion food in restaurants because the customers aim to taste the authentic flavour from where it is originated."* *(Respondent 2)*

*"I feel that this innovation and diversity can make food more interesting. But for example, nasi lemak usually has rice cooked with coconut milk, there are also eggs, anchovies, sambal, and beans. If the nasi lemak is changed into a burger only without any important element of the nasi lemak, for me it is very outrageous when using the name Nasi Lemak, but they deliberately lose the identity of the original nasi lemak."* *(Respondent 4)*

*"Maybe in terms of promoting our country or to suit Western tastes, it is not wrong for us to introduce our food according to the situation. But let us not abandon Malaysian identity. If you want to produce fusion food, let the Malaysian element be the priority so that we do not lose our food identity."* *(Respondent 7)*

As a conclusion for this theme, many responses and opinions are available from the domestic tourists' perspectives, related to the reinvention of local cuisines into a new form known as fusion cuisine. Many concerns have also arisen regarding reinvention as fusion cuisine may

ruin the authenticity and food identity of the authentic local cuisine. Concerns about health issues may arise uncontrollably from the nonsense add-ups such as excessive chocolates or cheeses on local foods. Conversely, some domestic tourists voiced out logical reasoning for agreeing to the reinvention of local cuisine, which from their perspectives, could help and ease the foreigners to adapt and consume local food enjoyably. They agreed to allow the local cuisine to be reinvented if only the experiments are held beautifully, producing better-innovated foods that may be more interesting for domestic tourists to try. Thus, innovation on local cuisines could help promote Malaysia as a food tourism destination on the condition that the authenticity is preserved to the utmost.

## 5 Discussion
### 5.1 Domestic Tourists' Knowledge of Fusion Cuisine

The first theme is to analyse whether domestic tourists have knowledge of fusion cuisine in Malaysia. The data concluded that 100% (n = 7) of them believed that they have knowledge of fusion cuisine in Malaysia from their readings, research or experiences. In addition, the informants managed to produce their own understanding and the so-called definition of fusion cuisine from the domestic tourists' perspectives. Most informants perceived fusion cuisine as combining two different types of foods or cuisines into one new dish. In addition, some viewpoints indicated that fusion cuisine could be defined as twisted foods that are innovated and modernised, which has its own uniqueness by differing from other foods, made to adapt to the local palate and taste. The informants' definitions support the statement above that the domestic tourists have knowledge of fusion cuisine in Malaysia. Authors should discuss the results and how they can be interpreted from the perspective of previous studies and of the working hypotheses. The findings and their implications should be discussed in the broadest context possible. Future research directions may also be highlighted.

Indeed, the domestic tourists proved that they could enlist several correct examples of fusion cuisine available in Malaysia. In addition, the examples given linked perfectly to the definition perceived by them as stated in the theme above. These examples were provided based on their own experiences as domestic tourists. This research accumulated several dishes made into fusion cuisine. First, five examples of fusion local dishes, five examples of fusion desserts, three examples of fusion pasta dishes, two examples of fusion burgers, and an example of fusion steak dish were gathered. All the examples obtained from seven informants are listed in Table 3.

After a thorough analysis, several differences between fusion and local cuisines from domestic tourists' perspectives were identified throughout this study. Since each informant had the right to provide numerous responses to the questions asked, their responses highlighted the differences that can be distinguished between those cuisines. Three responses were obtained from three different informants who believed that the additional elements in the dishes, different tastes, flavours and choice of ingredients could tell the consumer the significant differences between fusion and local cuisines. Accordingly, these three responses formed the most agreeable differences one could tell between fusion and local cuisine. Besides, several other differences that vary from the advertising and information on the cooking method were also observed.

To recapitulate, the findings linked with the definition by Al-Ferdous (2017), who defined fusion cuisine as a combination of two or more different culinary cultures to produce creative and often very fascinating dishes. Sarıoglan (2014) described fusion cuisine to have the sense of mixing and integrating the cooking methods and ingredients of different countries to be mixed and intentionally combined within the same plate.

Table 3: Examples of fusion cuisine from the domestic tourists' perspectives

| Fusion Local Dishes |
| --- |
| • Laksa Johor, Rice Laksa replaced by Spaghetti |
| • Pisang Goreng with Grated Cheese |
| • Apam Balik with Chocolate Rice |
| • Keropok Lekor with Cheese Sauce |
| • Asam Laksa Dry Version |

| Fusion Desserts |
| --- |
| • Nasi Lemak Ice Cream |
| • Sirap Bandung Cupcakes |
| • Infused Teh Tarik Cake |
| • Pandan Gula Melaka Cake |
| • Durian Cake |

| Fusion Pasta Dishes |
| --- |
| • Spaghetti Laksa |
| • Spaghetti Rendang |
| • Spaghetti with Masak Lemak Itik Salai |

| Fusion Burger |
| --- |
| • Salted Egg Butter Chicken Burger |
| • Burger Nasi Lemak |

| Fusion Steak Dish |
| --- |
| • Steak With Local Sauce such as Asam Pedas, Masak Lemak Cili Api, Asam Laksa |

## 5.2 Domestic Tourists' Food Preferences during Travel

Most of the informants shared their food preferences during travel. They mostly preferred authentic local cuisine. Nevertheless, two informants would prefer to enjoy both while travelling locally. These stands were based on an individual's reason. Domestic tourists prefer to have local cuisine during their travel because they want to explore the unfamiliar local culture and identity. Since Malaysia comprises 14 states with different cultures, travellers from different cultures and origins would be very excited to experience the new cuisine available at the chosen tourism destination. In addition, although the domestic tourists have tasted the local foods before, they would still prefer to have the authentic local cuisine repeatedly because they prefer the preserved authenticity of the local cuisine. Nevertheless, some domestic tourists love being adventurous with their food consumption, and they constantly want to challenge their palate with different types of foods.

Consuming fusion cuisine is believed to help bring nostalgia while enjoying it. One could reminisce good old days by reinventing dishes that may extinct or decrease production nationwide. On the contrary, the answers could be changed regarding food attraction instead of food preferences. Approximately 57% (n = 4) of the participants felt more attracted to fusion cuisine than local cuisine if both foods were introduced and served to them. The remaining 43% (n = 3) inarguably were still attracted to the authentic local cuisine rather than the fusion cuisine. Their curiosity about what is new on the plate and its uniqueness attracts them to the fusion cuisine.

This conclusion can be linked to the statement of Syakirah (2015), who pointed out that fashionable food culture has produced new charm in Malaysia. The influence of this food culture is not only related to preparation, consumption, or food but also their way of life. As a

result of the latest wave of food trends, the changing lifestyle of the public has prompted them to follow the fresh food model (Ali & Abdullah, 2012).

### 5.3 Domestic Tourists' Opinion on the Reinvention of Local Cuisine

From the perspective of domestic tourists, reinvention of local foods as fusion cuisine may evoke many reactions and opinions. There are several difficulties in creating new dishes because fusion cuisine will damage the authenticity and identity of authentic local cuisine and cause uncontrollable health issues that do not consider additions, such as excessive use of cheese and chocolate in local kitchens. On the other hand, domestic tourists' viewpoints have made it clear that local cuisine must be reinvented, which will help promote the adaptation and enjoyment of foreigners. They also agreed that if experiments are conducted long before the dish is sold to customers, culinary professionals should be encouraged to boldly transform local cuisine, which may arouse greater interest among domestic tourists.

Culinary professionals have played a role in improving the original food, and the Malaysian government should also promote fusion food. Concurrently, one of the parties must preserve the authenticity of the dishes. Authentic cuisine should not be transformed excessively until the essential identity, flavour, and originality change. In fact, the innovation of local cuisine will help promote Malaysia as a food tourism destination if the original flavour is maintained. On the contrary, some domestic tourists believe that displaying authentic local cuisine is essential if the purpose is to encourage tourism in Malaysia. The promotion of Malaysian foods that have been previously integrated is not allowed.

In retrospect, Molz (2007) described culinary tourism as the understanding or discovery of another culture and the exploration, adaptability, and openness to another cultural heritage. Raja Abdullah and Isa (2020) explained culinary tourism as one of the most prominent niche tourism markets. Culinary tourism also creates a memorable tourist experience while visiting a tourism destination (Stone, et al., 2022) and therefore many destination marketers currently use food as a source of new projects and programmes to encourage tourists to visit a country (Chang et al., 2011). In addition, a high degree of consideration and commitment must be given to maintaining a country's food tourism, especially local cuisine, because it is closely related to food preparation methods, dishes, and etiquette (Ramli et al., 2016). Local gastronomy or gastronomic tourism also helps to improve a country's tourism industry and becomes a country's soft power (Hussin, 2018). According to Turmo (2010), food is an important heritage that must be preserved. Food is a cultural expression that transmits the story from one generation to the next through unique ingredients, preparations, and food labels. Since these two factors represent identity and personal life, cultural and culinary heritage have complementary effects. The food of a country (Chin, 2020) and its uniqueness can reflect the many colourful local cultures (Omar & Omar, 2018).

### 5.4 The Implication of the Study

This study clarifies and broadens the views of local tourists on Malaysian fusion cuisine. Informants from different backgrounds provided comments and responses based on their travel experience in Malaysia. This research also revealed their understanding of the definition of fusion cuisine and their ability to distinguish the difference between fusion and local cuisines. This study also successfully discovered domestic tourists' food preferences and food attractiveness during travels and their reasons. Finally, this study explored the views of tourists globally on the fact that local cuisine has been transformed into fusion cuisine.

This research will be a good start to promote Malaysian fusion cuisine to the world. In essence, by exploring domestic tourists' views on Malaysian fusion cuisine, the government and the culinary community can improve and upgrade the local cuisine to make it look more refined

and taste better to suit local and international tastes. In addition, this research contributes to the new literature on how domestic tourists who consume fusion cuisine in Malaysia accept that their food is fusion cuisine and will help to broaden the knowledge by understanding domestic tourists' views on Malaysian fusion cuisine. This research may provide the Malaysian government with valuable insights to develop better strategies to deal with the rapid emergence of the local Malaysian fusion cuisine.

Additionally, this research may allow consumers to classify fusion food found locally in Malaysia clearly. Service providers or culinary professionals can utilise this research as their guidelines and parameters to provide customers with a better dining experience and service by providing the best quality food in line with globalisation and modern cuisine. This study is expected to provide a broader understanding of Malaysian food preferences and consumer acceptance of fusion cuisine. Moreover, future research may use various methods, such as quantitative or mixed methods, to explore in-depth information about this research topic. In the future, researchers can use different methods, such as quantitative or hybrid methods, to collect different responses from larger samples to generate new ideas and perspectives.

## 6 Conclusions

Research on domestic tourists' perceptions of Malaysian fusion cuisine is rarely discussed. As far as the researchers are concerned, no other research has the same interest as this. In several studies related to fusion cuisine, only a few researchers thoroughly clarified the perceptions of domestic tourists on Malaysian fusion cuisine. This research revealed some important content related to Malaysian fusion cuisine based on different understandings, experiences, and perspectives of different people, leading to different understanding and acceptance of fusion cuisine and reshaping local cuisine.

Nevertheless, research limitations must be given attention and consideration. Since this study only focused on the views of domestic tourists, the findings are specific and could not express the views of international tourists or different generations living in Malaysia. Furthermore, the method used to undertake this research is only a qualitative method. Therefore, the sample size is minimal and may differ from the general view of Malaysian fusion cuisine by domestic tourists. Therefore, qualitative methods could produce different findings when compared with quantitative methods. Finally, this study only explored the perspectives of national tourists, their food preferences, the attractiveness of food and their views on the remodelling of local cuisine into fusion cuisine in the future.

Due to the limited research related to fusion cuisine in Malaysia, future research can be explored from other perspectives, such as international tourists and the different generations living in Malaysia such as teenagers, adults and the elderly because different generations pay attention to food with different preferences and food intake. Personal opinions may vary due to different opinions on authentic local cuisine, or any other cuisine offered in Malaysia. Future research should also explore how fusion cuisine can help countries like Malaysia promote tourism and allow all types of travellers and tourists to experience its unique cuisine. Moreover, future research is also suggested to explore how Malaysia can balance the reinvention of local cuisines into fusion cuisines while focusing on preserving the authenticity of local cuisine.

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