

Study on the Current Situation and Promotion Strategies of Tourism Catering in Zhaoqing

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Abstract: This paper, through questionnaire surveys and interviews, finds that the development of tourism and catering industry in Zhaoqing City faces several issues. These include a lack of prominent local catering characteristics, insufficient promotion of local tourism catering, serious homogenization, a lack of innovation, unstable service quality, strong seasonality in tourism, and inadequate future planning. Based on the analysis of these problems, the development strategies summarized are: firstly, to enhance the quality of tourism catering products and services and create distinctive brands; secondly, to strengthen industry management and policy support to promote healthy industrial development; thirdly, to promote industry integration and innovation to expand development space.

Keywords: Zhaoqing City tourism catering, Promotion strategy, Gourmet tourism.

1. Introduction

According to the "2023 May Day Travel Data Report" released by Ctrip, during the 2023 "May Day" holiday, the flight distance of customers using the Ctrip website reached the highest value in the past four years, with the travel distance from their usual residence increasing by 25% compared to 2022; temporary accommodation bookings for users traveling to other provinces accounted for more than 70%; and the sales volume of tickets for domestic tourist attractions in China was nine times that of 2022. Mafengwo tourism data shows that during the "May Day" period, the demand for long-distance and outbound travel accelerated, with orders accounting for more than 85% [1]. With the development of the times, as people's incomes increase, they have long moved away from the era of only pursuing fullness. In travel, they will pay more attention to spiritual satisfaction, such as the taste, hygiene, environment, and even service enjoyment of food. Therefore, gourmet tourism has become a new development trend in the context of the new era [2].

Among the six major elements of tourism, catering is a fundamental supporting element that ensures the continuous progress of tourists' travel itineraries [3]. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, in the first quarter of 2023, the national catering revenue was 1213.6 billion yuan, an increase of 13.9% year-on-year, which is 9 percentage points higher than the growth rate of commodity retail sales. Many listed companies in the industry have shown good signs in their first-quarter reports and achieved a good start, with many companies' revenues and performances significantly exceeding pre-epidemic levels [4]. Tourism and local tourism catering promote and complement each other, because tourism can bring passenger flow to local catering, provide publicity for catering, and thus promote the development of the catering industry; of course, the uniqueness of local catering will also attract some tourists to come for tourism, making local specialty catering become the local tourism attraction and tourism business card, which will also promote the development of local tourism. For example, Guangzhou represented by Cantonese cuisine and Hunan represented by Hunan cuisine, the catering industry has actually become the first business card of urban tourism a long time ago. Taking

Liuzhou snail noodle in Guangxi as an example, many contemporary tourists choose Liuzhou as their tourist destination in order to taste authentic Liuzhou snail noodles. Many tourists regard food as a purpose of tourism or a new type of tourism, and it can even become the most important attraction of a tourist destination. A new type of tourism method of food activity experience is gradually emerging, and food tourism research is gradually gaining attention from the academic community [5]. Various places are also actively exploring the "tourism + catering" customer acquisition model.

In 2023, Zhaoqing City explored and showcased the unique culinary cultures from various regions, organically integrating gourmet food with a variety of tourism resources. Furthermore, they launched 16 "Cantonese Chef" themed gourmet rural boutique routes. This paper organizes and collects data on the catering situation in Zhaoqing's tourism sector, identifying and listing the advantages of Zhaoqing's tourism catering development, as well as its shortcomings and problems. In light of the current state of Zhaoqing's tourism catering development, targeted feasible development strategies are proposed. This aims to explore viable paths for the sustainable and high-quality development of Zhaoqing's tourism catering industry, thereby further promoting the growth of the tourism catering sector and steering it towards a more scientifically mature direction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Catering Industry and Its Economic Driving Force

The catering industry is an important link in improving the quality of people's lives, and it is also an important way to open up employment channels and revitalize the economy. Moreover, it plays an increasingly important role in improving people's lives and realizing the socialization of household labor [6]. The China Cuisine Association once defined the catering industry as business units that provide consumers with beverages, food, dishes, consumption venues, and equipment facilities through means such as production, processing, commodity sales, and service-oriented labor [7].

The current catering industry has many forms, but its core

and essence are the same, all aiming to satisfy people's physiological and psychological needs for food. By analyzing the composition of the catering industry, it can be categorized into the following types: The first type includes internal catering systems such as those found in hotels and guesthouses. This encompasses hotels, guesthouses, homestays, and entertainment venues with their own dining services; The second type refers to various scales of restaurants, banquet halls, and other independent dining services that provide gourmet food for customers; The third type consists of dining service institutions like those in enterprises, institutions, schools, and canteens [8].

Currently, China's catering industry is thriving, with its revenue continuously increasing [9]. The catering industry is closely related to many other industries. For instance, it has a significant connection with the primary sector, such as farming and planting, which provide raw materials for the catering industry. Without these two industries, there would be no raw materials for the catering industry. In the secondary sector, food processing, manufacturing, handicrafts, and architectural design for catering are all essential. The catering industry requires a richness in taste, seasonings, kitchen utensils like pots and pans, and related tools, all of which rely on the manufacturing and handicraft industries. The catering industry is an important part of the tertiary sector, and its development can greatly promote the growth of the tertiary sector. Generally speaking, areas with high tourist traffic or large crowds have a greater demand for the catering industry. In some regions, local specialty dishes are used as a unique attraction for tourists. Some tourists even visit these places solely to taste the local delicacies, such as Chongqing hotpot and Guangdong morning tea. With the addition of more new business formats, related enterprises in the surrounding areas will also increase further.

2.2. Tourism and Catering Industry

The catering industry and the tourism industry promote each other. In some regions, tourism leads the development of the catering industry, such as Guilin and Huangshan, while in others, the catering industry drives the growth of tourism, like Chengdu and Chongqing. Thus, a new industry has emerged from the intersection of these two sectors—the tourism catering industry [10]. The relationship between tourism catering and the tourism industry is inseparable; the tourism catering industry is a cross-sectoral format formed through the positive interaction and connection between the tourism and catering industries. The healthy development of the catering industry can greatly enhance the level of regional tourism, and conversely, it can inhibit the rapid development of the tourism industry [11]. In recent years, the contradiction between the rapid development of Zhaoqing's tourism industry and the slow or even stagnant growth of its catering industry has been intensifying. Therefore, the current goal is to jointly develop Zhaoqing's tourism and catering industries. Furthermore, the tourism catering industry is an essential component of tourism. Generally speaking, tourism encompasses six elements: food, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment. Among them, "food" comes first, making catering a key point and core, indicating that catering is a very important part of the tourism industry. Lastly, the quality of the tourism catering industry determines the quality of tourism services. The dining environment, hygiene conditions, specialty cuisine, and service quality of a tourist destination are what tourists

care about most when it comes to tourism catering. If a region's catering culture is backward, not distinct, and highly homogenized, and if the service quality of related personnel is unstable, lacking sanitary, safe, and pleasant dining environments, these issues can have a significant impact on local tourism development. They can damage the reputation of the tourist destination, and if not addressed promptly and appropriately, no one will choose to visit there in the end.

2.3. Current Status of Tourism Catering Research in Zhaoqing

From the perspective of dietary resources and culture, Zhaoqing has the Xijiang River flowing through it, and there are mountains around the city, which have given rise to unique dietary habits and a variety of delicacies in Zhaoqing. It is a place where one can taste authentic Cantonese cuisine. Integrating such distinctive culinary cultural resources with Zhaoqing's tourism industry is of great significance for developing the city's gourmet tourism economy and overcoming the difficulties faced by its tourism economic development [12]. In 2022, according to Zhaoqing's local GDP, the proportions of the three industrial structures were 18.0:41.7:40.3, with the tertiary industry having a higher proportion, indicating that tourism development is very important for Zhaoqing's economic growth [13]. In 2023, relying on the unique culinary cultures from various places, Zhaoqing organically integrated gourmet food with homestay cultural experiences, agricultural sightseeing, leisure health preservation, and other rural tourism resources, launching 16 "Cantonese Chef" themed rural tourism gourmet routes. These routes use food as a medium to further integrate local customs and rural tourism, enriching Zhaoqing's tourism catering formats [14]. In 2023, Zhaoqing City strived to promote the development of tourism catering, push for the deep integration of culture and tourism with various related industries, create a series of festival events with Zhaoqing flavors, and introduced many measures to boost consumption, aiming to rapidly develop Zhaoqing's tourism catering; developing the "night economy" is an essential content in the current development of tourism catering. Currently, popular spots like Duanzhou District's Yanqian Leisure Peninsula, Zijing West Dyke, Gaoyao Jinshatan Square, Zhaoqing New District's Car Boot Market, Sihui Juzi Li, and Huaiji Shilong Tent Campsite continue to attract crowds, with consumer enthusiasm continuously rising [15].

3. Research Methods

Through face-to-face conversations with local tourism and catering operators as well as consumers, the basic situation and shortcomings of the catering industry in Zhaoqing City were understood. The needs of consumers were organized and summarized. By observing the main catering gathering places in Duanzhou, Zhaoqing, the author conducted a field survey on the tourism catering situation in Duanzhou District of Zhaoqing City. Investigations and understandings were carried out in major catering business circles such as Zijing West Dyke, Songcheng Arcade Street, Jianming City, and near Zhaoqing College. Interviews were conducted with 3 catering shops and 10 tourists to understand the current status of Zhaoqing's tourism catering. With the help of "Meituan", "Gaode Map" and "Baidu Map", the overall tourism catering situation in Zhaoqing City was understood, including the number of catering establishments, types of cuisine, etc.

Notes were taken, and first-hand information was obtained through field investigations to provide more reliable data and content for the paper.

Simultaneously, questionnaires were distributed to groups of different age stages and varying consumption levels. The primary method was through online distribution of the surveys, with questions designed specifically for the content studied in this paper. The responses were then systematically organized and summarized. A total of 204 online questionnaires were released, providing more robust, intuitive, and reliable data support for this research.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Analysis of Zhaoqing's Tourism Catering Market

Zhaoqing City is located in the central-western part of Guangdong Province and is a city with a long history and rich culture. Of course, the food culture of Zhaoqing City also has a long history, integrating the traditional characteristics and local flavors of the Guangdong region, forming a unique food culture. According to the Guangdong Statistical Yearbook and Zhaoqing Statistical Yearbook, the number of catering enterprises above designated size (referring to enterprises with annual main business income of 2 million yuan or more) in Zhaoqing City reached 56 in 2023, 54 in 2022, 42 in 2021, 39 in 2020, and 39 in 2019. Based on the statistics of the number of catering enterprises above designated size in the past five years, the overall trend of the number of accommodation and catering enterprises above designated size is increasing. Statistics of small and medium-sized catering enterprises show that there are a total of 6,445 catering enterprises in Duanzhou District, 596 in Dinghu District, 635 in Gaoyao District, 1,422 in Sihui City, 285 in Guangning County, 554 in Huaiji County, 114 in Fengkai County, and 125 in Deqing County. The catering industry clusters in Zhaoqing City are mainly distributed in Duanzhou District, with snack fast food as the main type of cuisine.

On the demand side, this paper adopts a questionnaire survey method to collect demand data. The analysis finds that the main age group of tourists visiting Zhaoqing is between 25 and 40 years old, accounting for 48%, followed by 41-60 years old, 18-24 years old, over 61 years old, and finally under 18 years old. The survey also found that more than 80% of respondents believe that food plays an important role in travel, with 115 out of 204 surveyed tourists considering it very important. 46.6% of tourists spend less than 10% of their total travel budget on dining, 35.8% spend between 10% and 30%, and 12.7% spend between 30% and 50%. 28.9% of tourists prioritize the taste of food during their travels, 27.9% prioritize service attitude, 20.6% prioritize the dining environment, and 18.1% prioritize hygiene. All areas need improvement. Finally, targeted promotion and marketing should be conducted based on the ways tourists usually learn about Zhaoqing cuisine.

4.2. Advantages of Zhaoqing's Tourism and Catering Industry Development

Firstly, Zhaoqing has a profound cultural heritage and is rich in tourism resources with an advantageous location. According to the Guangdong Provincial Conditions website, Zhaoqing is a historical and cultural city, boasting abundant historical and cultural heritage and traditional culture. The culture of Zhaoqing is represented by the ancient cities of

Duanzhou and Deqing. Duanzhou was once the site of the governor's office for Guangdong and Guangxi during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with a history of over two thousand years. It still retains many precious ancient sites, buildings, modern historical and cultural districts, ancient villages, etc. Many historically famous figures have also left their marks in Duanzhou, such as Ye Ting and Bao Zheng. Within the Duanzhou district, there are 6 national A-level scenic spots, with Xinghu Scenic Area being a 5A-level spot, and 5 3A-level spots (Beiling Mountain Forest Park, Baogong Cultural Park, Yuejiang Tower, Zhilian Dream Factory, Xiangmanyuan Soy Sauce Workshop). There are also 4 national-level cultural relic protection units (Song City Wall, Mei An, Qixingyan Cliff Inscriptions, Ye Ting Independent Regiment Headquarters Site). Tourism reception is quite diversified, not only offering famous and authentic Cantonese cuisine but also local specialty dishes. Accommodation options are plentiful, ranging from hotels of various levels and types to unique homestays and the recently popularized RV campsites. In terms of geographical location, Zhaoqing is situated in the central-western part of Guangdong Province and serves as one of the intersections connecting the central-eastern cities of Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, and other provinces in southwestern China. Zhaoqing's favorable location provides a source of tourists for the development of its tourism and catering industries. If appropriate marketing methods are employed and promotion is in place, capturing the right market trends will undoubtedly attract tourists from all regions to spend here.

4.3. Problems Existing in the Tourism Catering Industry of Zhaoqing

Firstly, the marketing and promotion efforts for Zhaoqing's tourism catering are insufficient. Through on-site investigations, when asking businesses about their general methods of promotion, most catering businesses use "Douyin" (TikTok) and Meituan to release promotional information. The channels for promotion are limited, and relevant departments have not put enough effort into the overall marketing of Zhaoqing's catering. Zhaoqing's promotion of tourism catering is not widespread or in-depth, lacking comprehensive market research and precise target user positioning. The promotional efforts for tourism catering products are also lacking. There are few videos and articles promoting Zhaoqing's local specialties on major websites, and the traffic is low. Content related to Zhaoqing's tourism catering is scarce on authoritative websites. There are also shortcomings in the development of e-commerce platforms for tourism products, resulting in lower online sales efficiency and effects compared to other well-developed tourist cities.

Secondly, the competition for homogenized tourism catering products is quite fierce, and they are relatively uniform, lacking distinctiveness.

Currently, the phenomenon of product homogenization in the tourism industry is quite common. In field research, it was found that the cuisine in Zhaoqing Zijing West Dyke Food Street is similar to other popular cuisines. The author discovered that there is only one specialty agricultural product store in the entire street, and the food in the newly developed food streets in Zhaoqing are all similar. Popular snacks in many tourist cities can be found on almost every food street in Zhaoqing, but there is a lack of distinctive local Zhaoqing cuisine or a certain cultural essence. Some tourism products are simply imported for sale. Additionally, the dining

environment is also particularly important for tourists' experiences. Zhaoqing Songcheng Arcade Street could have been developed as a unique street in Duanzhou, Zhaoqing, but it currently lacks innovation and local cultural characteristics. Homogenized products not only affect tourists' experiences but may also reduce their satisfaction, thereby restricting the sustainable development of the tourism and catering industries.

Thirdly, Zhaoqing's tourism and catering products lack innovation. While Zhaoqing cuisine should retain its unique characteristics, it also needs to innovate. For instance, the well-known Zhaoqing dish, wrapped steamed zongzi, can introduce new tourism projects combined with research and study programs, allowing students to personally experience the process from making to cooking the wrapped steamed zongzi. While preserving the original cooking methods and ingredients, there should be more attempts to add new fillings and other methods to enhance the added value of the product. However, currently, Zhaoqing cuisine lacks a certain degree of innovation. The taste preferences of guests are ever-changing. Without innovation, there is a lack of sustainable development momentum, leading to a gradual decline in its appeal to guests and a potential decrease in tourist numbers.

Fourth, the quality of service is unstable. Both the tourism and catering industries belong to the service sector and have high requirements for service quality. Survey data shows that there are as many as tens of thousands of catering stores in Zhaoqing's tourism industry, with a variety of catering types and different sizes of catering environments. The quality of some catering services in Zhaoqing's tourism industry is unstable, which can affect customers' travel experience.

Fifth, the seasonality of tourism catering demand is extremely strong. Through interviews with local catering businesses, the author found that there is a significant difference in customer flow between weekends and weekdays, as well as between holidays and regular days, leading to a decline in tourism revenue. The author conducted field investigations on Dongmen Town Food Street in Zhaoqing, from its establishment in 2023 to its decline at the beginning of 2024. Through interviews with local residents, it was learned that the food street had poor customer flow on regular days, and even worse during the New Year period. Without the support of customer flow, it was difficult for the food street to sustain itself. The food street lacked thorough planning and research before its establishment, ultimately leading to the closure of many businesses.

5. Conclusions and Countermeasures

5.1. Conclusion

Zhaoqing's tourism and catering products are unique and diverse. If they are explored and developed, they will undoubtedly promote the development of Zhaoqing's tourism. Among the tourists visiting Zhaoqing, young tourists still occupy a significant position. They place high importance on food during their travels, so it is essential to pay attention to the needs of this young tourist group. Tourists tend to focus on the taste of the food, service attitude, environment, and hygiene. Therefore, it is hoped that Zhaoqing's tourism catering will improve in these areas. Lastly, tourists are often influenced by recommendations from friends and family when choosing a travel destination. Thus, while meeting the basic needs of tourists, it is also crucial to enhance the reception capabilities and professionalism of related service

personnel to further increase tourist satisfaction. This will deepen the good impression tourists have of Zhaoqing, leading them to personally promote and recommend Zhaoqing. Correspondingly, there should also be an emphasis on promoting and marketing Zhaoqing through current media channels, especially with the popularity of short videos, focusing on using them for promotion.

During visits to Zijin West Dyke in Duanzhou District, Song City Wall Arcade Street, Agile City, and the dining business circle of Zhaoqing College, the author identified several issues in Zhaoqing's tourism and catering industry. These include insufficient marketing and promotion efforts, intense homogenized competition, lack of distinctive features, a rather monotonous range of tourism products, absence of innovation, unstable service quality, strong seasonal demand for tourism catering, and unreasonable planning for tourism catering. These problems hinder Zhaoqing City's progress towards becoming a higher-level tourism and catering city.

5.2. Inspiration

Based on the investigations and analyses conducted earlier, in view of the strengths, weaknesses, and development bottlenecks in the tourism and catering industry of Zhaoqing City, this paper proposes the following management insights:

Firstly, it is necessary to enhance the quality of tourism catering products and services, and establish distinctive brands. It is important to strengthen local characteristics and develop diversified catering products. Zhaoqing City has abundant natural and cultural resources, which provide unique materials for the development of catering products. We should delve into the local specialty ingredients of Zhaoqing City, such as Xijiang River seafood and mountain game, and combine them with traditional local cooking techniques to develop dishes with strong local features. At the same time, we encourage catering enterprises to innovate by integrating modern cooking techniques with traditional flavors, introducing a variety of catering products to meet the taste preferences of different tourists. Service quality is one of the core competitive strengths in the catering industry. The tourism catering sector in Zhaoqing City should prioritize training its service staff, enhancing their professional skills and service awareness, ensuring that tourists enjoy considerate and professional service during their dining experience. Moreover, catering businesses should pay attention to creating a dining ambiance, using decor style, background music, lighting, and other details to offer tourists a comfortable and warm dining environment, thereby elevating the overall dining experience. Building on the enhancement of product and service quality, the tourism catering industry in Zhaoqing City should strive to create catering brands with local characteristics. By registering trademarks and applying for geographical indication protection, the legitimate rights and interests of local catering brands can be safeguarded. Simultaneously, through media promotion and online marketing, brand awareness and reputation can be improved, bolstering market competitiveness.

Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen industry management and policy support to promote the healthy development of the industry. Firstly, it is necessary to improve industry management and standardize market order. The government should strengthen the supervision of the tourism catering industry, improve relevant laws and regulations, clarify industry standards and norms, and ensure the stability

of market order and fair competition. At the same time, establish a sound complaint handling mechanism to solve problems encountered by tourists during meals in a timely manner and protect their legitimate rights and interests. In addition, food safety supervision of catering enterprises should be strengthened to ensure the dietary safety of tourists. At the same time, the government should introduce a series of policy measures to support the upgrading and development of the tourism catering industry. For example, provide tax incentives and financial subsidies to eligible catering enterprises; encourage catering enterprises to introduce advanced technology and management experience to improve the overall level of the industry; promote cooperation between catering enterprises and tourist attractions to achieve resource sharing and mutual benefit. It is also necessary to strengthen talent training and improve the overall quality of the industry. Talent is a key factor in the development of the tourism catering industry. The government should increase efforts to train catering talents, encourage young people to enter the catering industry by setting up scholarships and providing internship opportunities. At the same time, strengthen cooperation with universities and vocational training institutions, carry out catering skills training, management knowledge training and other activities to improve the overall quality of the industry.

Firstly, it is necessary to promote the deep integration of tourism and catering, and make full use of Zhaoqing's rich tourism resources to promote the deep integration of tourism and catering. By holding food festivals, food culture festivals and other activities, the catering culture and tourism resources are combined to attract tourists to taste delicious food and experience the culture. At the same time, catering enterprises are encouraged to open branches or specialty restaurants in tourist attractions to provide tourists with more convenient and diverse catering options.

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