

# LOCAL MALAY SNACKS AND DESSERTS: THE HIDDEN GEMS OF TERENGGANU

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## ABSTRACT

*With a unique culture and vibrant tourist attractions, Terengganu has become one of the leading tourism destinations in Malaysia. Apart of stunning sceneries, islands and beaches, Terengganu cuisine has also become a tourism product for both local and foreign tourists. Situated along South China Sea, Terengganu is blessed with abundance of fish, seafood and coconut tree which become the main ingredients for most of its cuisines. Resulting from the acculturation of its neighbouring cultures, the cuisine is the melting pot of flavour from Malay and Thai. Nasi Dagang, Nasi Kerabu, Keropok Lekor, Sata, Bekang, Bronok, Qasidah, and Asam Gumpal are the iconic foods that are widely highlighted by the tourism authority. Besides all the prominent local cuisines in Terengganu there are still local cuisines that are hidden from the eyes of the public. Therefore, this paper focuses to explore Terengganu traditional Malay foods that are not typically promoted as tourism product. The study is based on secondary data gathered from journals, articles and tourism manuals. It is found that, there are aplenty other unnoticed foods that are unique to the state. These signature foods are vastly potential as attractive tourism products. This conceptual paper provides scholars and practitioner a great potential of insight view towards food as a unique identity of Terengganu that can be utilized as tourism product. Subsequently, it will lead to a well-planned strategy in order to upsurge the locals' income and boosting the state's economy.*

**Keywords:** signature food, hidden gems, local snacks, local desserts, Terengganu

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely regarded that the state of Terengganu is the cradle of Malay culture in Malaysia. The state is rich in its fantastic natural beauty, amazing adventurous activities and the colourful tradition and heritage that being kept alive in its land. In addition to sceneries, islands and beaches, local heritage is also an important element in attracting local and foreign tourists (Halim, 2012). Whilst there are many distinctive local heritage and tradition, food is one of the most fundamental. Promoting local foods and production will greatly helpful to increase visitation particularly in rural area (Siow et al., 2013). Inevitably, traditional foods and its uniqueness are exclusively part of a destination's cultural identity. However, while there are many popular food from local area that they promote the food only popular in the area or the cycle of the state. This bring to a big question why it happens? Thus, the promotion is not

strong enough or there is no demand for that particular cuisine? Although there is many research on the popular food, few of them ever mention in deep research about the unpopular local snack and dessert that widely produce in Terengganu. Therefore, this study was spawned from the lack of research on the local snack and dessert of Terengganu that are hidden from the public eyes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Food as Cultural Identity***

While eating is important for nutrient intake, but in actual fact, food plays complex roles in fulfilling human needs (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). It involves not only the experience of tasting and indulging the food, but brings together the importance of interacting with other people during a meal thus; food has capacity to function as a representation of a cultural identity of a particular culture (Hall & Mitchel, 2000). The appeal of the natural resources, the common history, the skills, the knowledge and a shared memory by the people living in an area have an obvious cultural and historical identity (Haukeland & Jacobsen (2001). Cultural aspects like food and customs generate meaning and identity (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 1999).

Therefore, food is an insignia that the people of a community identify themselves and are also recognized by those who are not the member of the community (Bassiere, 1998). It has conclusively been shown that the linking between local people and the land is often conveyed through the culinary heritage rooted in the long history. The character of a society and, the mentality of its members, to some extent, can be revealed through cooking traditions of an area (Haukeland & Jacobsen, 2001).

Research finding by Hassan, (2011) also points that Malaysia cuisine has been associated with different cultures and groups, local delicacy such as kuih has a significant historical, religious and societal value. Knowledge of authentic Malay kuih is often passed down from generation to the generation through oral tradition and practices are varies among individuals and communities through the effect of acculturation and enculturation.

### ***Acculturation and Enculturation of Foods***

Acculturation is a process of culture changes; blending from belief and customs between or among two culture by acquiring the capability to function within the dominant culture while holding to the original culture (Rudmin, 2003). Enculturation, on the other hand, is a process of passing learned culture by passing it from generation to generation (Kirshner, D., and Meng, L., 2011). Recipes, preparations, methods of cooking and presentation are thought by parents to children so that the heritage can be preserved for the next generations. This process of learning is also important to be observed predominantly in the era of modernization.

Since Malaysia being the melting pot of many cultures (Noriza, Zahari, Shazali, Rosmaliza, and Hannita, 2012), a critical question on whether or not acculturation has taken place during the transfer of food knowledge, in the context of Terengganu foods, is worth to wonder about. Looking into its geographical location, Terengganu could have received the cultural influences from its neighbours in the north, the state of Kelantan as well as the bordering country Thailand and the state of Pahang in the south. (Raji. M. N. A., et al, 2017). Although those foods are

made of ingredients consist of whole foods grown locally, and is produced using traditional method, to what extend this product is authentic is creditable to be studied as well.

### ***Terengganu Foods***

The state of Terengganu is geographically located along South China Sea. It has one of the longest Malaysia's coastlines spanning 244 kilometer in length. As such, it is rich in marine resources and community activities that related to the fishery, agriculture and marine product processing. Due to that as well, Terengganu has become one of the major sub sectors in Malaysia for fish and fish products (Saat, 2017).

The Terengganu Tourism Board (2019) highlighted several foods unique to the state. *Nasi Dagang, Nasi Kerabu, Keropok Lekor, Sata, Bekang, Bronok, Qasidah, and Asam Gumpal* are the iconic fish-based foods that are widely highlighted. The information on these foods is commonly found on many promotional tools such as in websites and leaflets targeted to tourists. Moreover, there are also some journal that make a research on Satar and Keropok Lekor (Nurul Atiqah R., et al., 2014), (Zim, A.F.M.I.U., et al., 2019). Holding to the fact that different types of foods are associated to a destination, it is accordingly important to make the most of in the marketing and promotion to promote the food for tourism.

### ***Food Tourism***

Food tourism has become a crucial sector of the tourism industry (Santich, 2004). Food tourism, which also known as gastronomy tourism or culinary tourism can be defined as "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food and tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a specialist food production region are the primary motivating factors for travel" (Hall and Mitchell, 2001). It provides tourists with exceptional experience by which they could experience the culture of a destination and associate it with history of the area (Jalis H., 2014). As such, the main stimuli for people to travel are to experience and taste the food and drinks for their lasting memory (Wolf, E., 2002).

Furthermore, tourism authority emphasis the iconic foods, traditional Terengganu cuisine is not limited, there are many other snacks and desserts that are savoured by the locals on daily basis but somehow hidden from the non-member of the local community. Therefore, Tourism Terengganu should utilize local cuisines as brand image by bringing the local snack and dessert into highlight. Moreover, Henderson (2004) also suggests that food and destination should been conceived as the noticeable products that characterize tourists' overall experience. Other than tourist, local community were also gain benefit. The increase of the demand will help producer to increase the production, creating a new job opportunity to other local people and eventually increase local economy at the same time, it's is called multiplier effect (Domański B. & Gwosdz K., 2010).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This conceptual study is based on secondary sources gathered from journals, articles, research projects and tourism manuals. Secondary data use to identify the gap that has not been study such as the unpopular local snack and dessert that are still hidden. Trend tend to change pace fast that include food trend. People are more creative, changing or developing new idea and flavour for foods. If the local snack and dessert not being study or highlighted and the trend

keeping changing without realizing the original eventually lost of its identity. Hence, the local cuisine will disappear from our history because younger generation could no longer identify the original from the trend. Therefore, this study will highlight the local snack and dessert by mapping it with the popular cuisine.

## DISCUSSION

Besides those that are well promoted and well renowned by tourists, there are various other foods familiar with the locals. As appears in the Table 1.1, the researchers outlined the popular and unpopular snacks and desserts of Terengganu.

| POPULAR              | UNPOPULAR                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Satar</i>         | <i>Kuih Che Abas Demam</i>    |
| <i>Keropok Lekor</i> | <i>Tembosa</i>                |
| <i>Akok</i>          | <i>Blebak</i>                 |
| <i>Bronok</i>        | <i>Putu Halba</i>             |
| <i>Qasidah</i>       | <i>Tepung Kapur</i>           |
| <i>Asam Gumpal</i>   | <i>Kuih Beko</i>              |
| <i>Bekang</i>        | <i>Nisan Nyior</i>            |
| <i>Nasi Kerabu</i>   | <i>Kuih Loklik</i>            |
| <i>Nasi Dagang</i>   | <i>Kuih Belimbing</i>         |
|                      | <i>Rojak Sentul</i>           |
|                      | <i>Rojak Kateh</i>            |
|                      | <i>Kuih Pasung</i>            |
|                      | <i>Paung Goreng Inti Ikan</i> |
|                      | <i>Sagong Kelapa</i>          |
|                      | <i>Tahi itik</i>              |
|                      | <i>Nekbat</i>                 |
|                      | <i>Ganang</i>                 |

**Table 1.1** Comparison of popular and unpopular cuisine in Terengganu

The most promoted and studied cuisine become the popular cuisine. However, interestingly, besides the aforementioned, the unpopular local snacks and desserts are more than the popular, promoted cuisine. This cuisine is maybe unknown to non-local Terengganu people but, are prominent among the locals. They are sold widely in the streets, farmer markets and night markets. Among others are *Kuih Beko*, *Paung Goreng Inti Ikan*, and *Kuih Loklik*. *Kuih Beko* are the snack made from grated coconut and glutinous rice flour and baked using heat from coconut fibre which gives it distinctive aroma and taste. *Paung Goreng Inti Ikan* is a fried snack with fish filling. The fish filling is called *Serunding Ikan*; a well-cooked fish flesh in coconut milk with local herbs and spices. The *serunding* is also used as filling in *Karipap Ikan*, a traditional Malay puff unique to Terengganu. *Kuih Loklik* is made using the leftover rice. The rice is dried and ground before being cook again with grated coconut. It is then moulded into small size ball-shape before dusted with rice flour. Surely, due to lack of promotion there is very little information available specifically to these traditional cuisines. Then, the question is why these cuisine is not popular outside Terengganu? What is the most striking problem face by local community? How can the other food become popular eventhough the cuisine was produced from the same area? Neither lack of promotion nor demand might be a question? Does the method of production is so traditional and unable to modernize? Or people just lack skill to produce the food? Or it might be limited resources availability outside Terengganu?

The finding highlights that even so the marketing emphasis by the tourism authority on the well promoted iconic foods of Terengganu, detail studies on these foods are still lacking chiefly on the origin and history its recipe, ingredients and method of cooking. This is more thoughtful especially for those that are not well-known; *the hidden gems*. This not only happen in Terengganu but also other state such as Kelantan, they have the hidden cuisine that only popular among the local and unable to penetrate outside the state eventhough the locals have been making these foods for so many years.

## CONCLUSION

The available studies pertaining Terengganu foods is scarce. From the review, four attentions could be taken into considerations for further investigation. First, iconic local food must continue to uphold and enriched with more information. Second, Food renowned by local communities must not limit only to locals. Those *hidden gems* must be made known to other cultures especially the tourists either domestic or foreign. They can be the multiplier effects of tourism by bringing more tourists to visit that will eventually nurture the development of socio-economy among local community. Third, the acculturation process, if any, could be certain to enhance the body of knowledge on the heritage trail. Forth, enculturation of food knowledge should be taken place so that Terengganu can sustain their local food culture. The unique preparation and method of cooking as well as the distinctive names should be preserved for the future generations. While putting all these in place, both the authorities as well as non-governmental organization could continue to play roles in promoting culinary heritage in fostering its tourism industry as one of the income generators for the state.

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