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Research Paper

Haute Cuisine, Cultural Capital, and Tourist Destination Image: A Qualitative Study from Türkiye

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Abstract

This study approaches haute cuisine and fine dining not only as an area of gastronomic development but also as a strategic tool for the image building, international positioning, and competitive differentiation of tourist destinations. The primary objective of the research is to examine the role of the fine dining ecosystem in Turkey on destination image from a multi-stakeholder perspective and to reveal its contributions to the destination marketing and management literature. The research was designed within the qualitative research paradigm using a phenomenological approach; data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. A total of 19 participants, selected through purposive sampling, consisted of Michelin-starred chefs, fine dining restaurant owners, young generation chefs, gastronomy academics, gastronomy writers, consumers who regularly experience fine dining, and international gastrotourists. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis. The research findings show that fine dining experiences enhance the perceived prestige, cultural sophistication, and experiential value of destinations. Fine dining stands out as a symbolic tool that highlights the dimensions of exclusivity and quality in destination image, especially for tourist segments with high spending potential. It was determined that international guides such as the Michelin Guide play an important role in increasing the global visibility of Turkey's fine dining scene; however, this visibility has not yet been transformed into a comprehensive and sustainable strategy in the context of destination marketing and management. In conclusion, the study reveals that fine dining is not only a gastronomic value for Turkey but also a strategic asset in terms of destination image and international competitiveness; it offers important theoretical and practical insights in the context of destination management, gastronomic diplomacy, and brand positioning.

Keywords

Keywords: Fine dining, haute cuisine, destination image, destination marketing, culinary tourism, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Competition among destinations in the global tourism market is shaped not only by natural and cultural attractions, but also by the quality and perceived value of the experiences offered to visitors. In this context, destination image stands out as one of the most critical factors influencing tourists' travel decisions; it is at the heart of destinations' efforts to differentiate themselves, position themselves, and create brand value. Today's destination marketing literature reveals that experiential, symbolic, and cultural elements play a decisive role in shaping destination image, beyond material attractions (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Richards, 2002).

Among these experiential elements, gastronomy has increasingly taken on a strategic position in shaping destination image in recent years. Food and beverage experiences are not merely a basic need for tourists; they have become a powerful narrative tool that reflects the destination's cultural identity, lifestyle, and uniqueness (Şahin, 2015). Gastronomy tourism, in particular, is considered an important sub-field that increases the competitiveness of destinations, boosts visitor spending, and contributes to destination branding (Richards, 2002). In this context, gastronomy goes beyond being a complementary element that strengthens the destination image and becomes a strategic marketing and management tool in the perceptual positioning of the destination. The concepts of haute cuisine and fine dining occupy a privileged position in this transformation of gastronomy. Traditionally associated with French cuisine, haute cuisine represents high technical skill, artistic presentation, and superior service standards (Ferguson, 2004), while fine dining carries this concept into a holistic experience framework, offering a destination experience that encompasses not only food but also atmosphere, storytelling, and aesthetic values (Cousins, Foskett & Gillespie, 2002). Today, fine dining restaurants are not only places of gastronomic excellence; they are also considered symbolic spaces that reinforce the perception of sophistication, prestige, and cultural depth of destinations.

In this context, fine dining stands out as an effective tool in rebuilding the destination image, particularly among high-end and high-spending tourists. Small-portion, high-quality dining experiences with a story make the destination's cultural capital visible and offer visitors meaningful experiences beyond ordinary consumption practices. When evaluated through Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital approach, the fine dining experience functions both as an indicator of individual status and as an image component representing the cultural elitism of the destination. In this respect, fine dining contributes to the destination being perceived not only as a “place to go” but also as a “cultural space to be experienced and remembered.”

Türkiye has significant potential in terms of building a gastronomy-based destination image with its rich historical heritage, multi-layered culinary culture, and geographical diversity (Güney, 2021; Li & Lai, 2021; Demirkıran & Demir, 2023). The Turkish cuisine's wide range of products, from grains to vegetables, meat dishes to olive oil dishes, offers the opportunity to convey the destination's cultural uniqueness to international visitors by reinterpreting it within the framework of fine dining (Güney, 2021). However, it is observed that fine dining practices in Türkiye have long been limited to the success of individual chefs and have not been sufficiently integrated into a comprehensive strategy in the context of destination marketing and management (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Eren & Güldemir, 2017).

This situation creates a striking paradox for Türkiye: on the one hand, there is a strong culinary heritage and internationally successful chefs, while on the other hand, these successes are not systematically and sustainably reflected in the destination's image. The inclusion of Istanbul in 2022 and Izmir and Bodrum in 2023 in the Michelin Guide has been an important turning point for the international visibility of Türkiye's fine dining scene, presenting a significant opportunity to reframe the destination image on a global scale (Michelin Guide, 2022; Beijing Times, 2024). However, questions about the strategic role fine dining plays in destination marketing and management, how it is perceived by stakeholders, and the extent to which it contributes to destination image are still limited in the literature.

The aim of this study is to examine haute cuisine and fine dining culture in Türkiye not only as a gastronomic development process but also as a strategic tool in terms of destination image and international positioning. The study aims to reveal the role of fine dining in destination perception, prestige, and competitive strength by analyzing the views of chefs, restaurant owners, academics, gastronomy writers, consumers, and gastrotourists from a holistic perspective. In this respect, the research aims to go beyond the gastronomy literature and offer conceptual and practical contributions on how fine dining can be integrated into destination marketing and destination management literature.

2. Conceptual Framework

Positioning the Concepts of Haute Cuisine and Fine Dining in the Context of Destination Image

The term haute cuisine first emerged in France in the 19th century and refers to a culinary approach that requires high-quality ingredients, an artistic presentation concept, and advanced technical skills (Ferguson, 2004). Historically associated with exclusivity, refinement, and mastery, this concept has evolved over time into a symbolic structure representing not only culinary practice but also a specific lifestyle and cultural sophistication. Fine dining, on the other hand, takes this understanding in a broader context and is defined as a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only the quality of the food but also the standard of service, the spatial atmosphere, and the overall customer experience (Cousins, Foskett & Gillespie, 2002). Today, fine dining and haute cuisine are considered important tools not only for gastronomic excellence but also for experience-based consumption and the production of perceptual value. The modern approach to gastronomy aims to blend traditional techniques with contemporary methods, develop innovative flavors, and create narrative-based dining experiences. This approach also encompasses current trends such as molecular gastronomy, the farm-to-table movement, and sustainable kitchen practices (Blumenthal, 2008). In this context, fine dining transcends the physical restaurant experience, transforming into an experiential platform that reflects the destination's cultural depth, aesthetic understanding, and way of life.

In the context of Turkish cuisine, fine dining and haute cuisine are defined as a type of restaurant where creativity is at the forefront, inspired by different ethnic cuisines, serving high-quality food in small portions, mostly using seasonal and local products, integrated with a high-end atmosphere and service concept, and positioned at price levels above standard restaurants (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). Although haute cuisine has historically been synonymous with French cuisine, today it has evolved into an innovative structure that draws international inspiration and reinterprets local culinary heritage in contemporary forms. In this context, haute cuisine offers an inclusive framework that represents the adaptation of the rich traditional heritage of Turkish cuisine to modern and refined standards.

The development of the food and beverage sector in Türkiye over the past decade has led to a significant increase in the number and visibility of niche restaurant concepts such as fine dining. This growth is associated with individuals shifting their dining-out behavior from being merely a physiological need to becoming part of a quest for experience, pleasure, and self-fulfillment (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). This transformation signals a growing maturity toward experiential consumption in the Turkish consumer market, paving the way for high value-added gastronomic experiences such as fine dining to become strategic tools that can be used to strengthen the perception of destinations as high-end.

Cultural Gastronomy, Gastro-Identity, and Destination Image Building

Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital reveals that consumption practices in the field of gastronomy are related not only to individual preferences but also to social position, status, and symbolic values. Within this framework, the fine dining experience functions as a social status indicator for individuals, while also becoming a powerful image component for destinations, representing cultural elitism and sophistication. Fine dining establishments are not merely places where food is served; they are also considered symbolic spaces where the cultural narrative of the destination is produced and consumed. Reinterpreting Turkish cuisine within the framework of haute cuisine requires striking a delicate balance between traditional values and modern approaches (Gürsoy, 2015). The process of adapting Turkish cuisine, with its sharing-based, generous portions, and community-centered culinary culture, to the individual, artistic, and experience-oriented structure of fine dining brings with it the tension between preserving authenticity and innovation (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). However, this transformation also presents an important opportunity to contribute to the perception of Turkish cuisine as more refined, contemporary, and international in the context of destination image.

Gastronomy is considered an important type of tourism that has a decisive impact on travel motivations, strengthens destination image, and contributes to local economies (Şahin, 2015). In this context, fine dining restaurants have the potential to increase the economic and symbolic value of a destination by attracting tourist segments with high spending potential. Beyond this, gastronomy is also considered a public diplomacy tool that makes a country's cultural heritage visible internationally and can function as an element of “soft power” (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023). Within this framework, fine dining has the capacity to strengthen the destination's international image as a high-profile representation of the national culinary culture.

Gastronomic tourism is defined by Richards (2002) as the mobility of tourists who view food and beverage experiences as their primary travel motivation. Within this definition, fine dining restaurants are considered not merely a complementary element in destination marketing, but strategic components that play a central role within the destination's set of attractions (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Fine dining experiences contribute to the repositioning of the destination image in the upper segment by increasing the perceived quality, prestige level, and differentiation capacity of the destination. When examining the factors influencing the development and social acceptance of the fine dining sector in Türkiye, it is seen that per capita income level and overall economic stability directly affect the demand for high-priced, small-portion gastronomic experiences (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). In this context, the perceived difference between consumers' search for satisfaction in their eating-out habits and experience-oriented consumption plays a decisive role (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Taşcı, 2021). The influence of elements such as prestige, luxury, and status on fine dining preferences reveals that these experiences carry not only gastronomic but also symbolic value (Taşcı, 2021).

The presence of qualified chefs and service staff, along with the quality of culinary education, is critical for the sustainable development of the fine dining sector (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Sökmen & Karamustafa, 2024). However, it is evident that global guides and award systems, such as the Michelin Guide, play an important role in both raising the quality standards of restaurants and increasing the international visibility of destinations (Beijing Times, 2024; Michelin Guide, 2025). Such global platforms transform fine dining into a strategic lever for destination marketing and management, taking it beyond individual business success. Increasing sustainability trends on a global scale are profoundly affecting the philosophy of fine dining restaurants and consumer preferences. The concept of sustainable gastronomy encompasses the use of local products, reduction of environmental impact, and social responsibility principles (Gössling, Garrod, Aall, Hille & Peeters, 2011), becoming an element that further strengthens the impact of fine dining concepts on destination image. This approach contributes to destinations being perceived not only as attractive but also as responsible and conscious tourism areas.

3. Method

This research was designed within the framework of a qualitative research paradigm to reveal how the phenomenon of fine dining and haute cuisine is experienced and interpreted in the Turkish context in terms of destination image, international positioning, and perceptual value creation. Since the study aimed to examine in depth perceptions, experiences, and interpretive meaning structures that are difficult to measure with quantitative methods, a phenomenological approach was adopted. The phenomenological design provides an appropriate research ground for revealing how different stakeholder groups experience the phenomenon of fine dining, what meanings they attach to these experiences, and how this process is reflected in the destination image. In the study, the phenomenological approach was adopted with an interpretive perspective, focusing on conceptualizing these experiences through common themes and patterns of meaning rather than merely describing the participants' subjective experiences. In this respect, the study approaches fine dining not only as a gastronomic practice but also as a phenomenon experienced in the context of destination marketing and management.

Data Collection Method and Study Group

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were preferred as the data collection method in the research. This method allows for the production of comparable data in line with predetermined research questions, while also enabling participants to freely express their own experiences, perceptions, and evaluations. The interview questions were developed based on a comprehensive literature review and the opinions of field experts; they were structured to focus on thematic areas such as destination image, gastronomic experience, international recognition, and the perceptual role of fine dining.

The working group was determined using a purposive sampling method and formed to include key stakeholder groups who experience the phenomenon of fine dining from different perspectives. Accordingly, a total of 19 participants were included in the research: Michelin-starred restaurant chefs (3), owners of prominent fine dining restaurants (3), young generation chefs (2), academics specializing in gastronomy (3), gastronomy writers and critics (3), consumers who regularly experience fine dining (3), and international gastronomic tourists (2). This diversity allowed fine dining to be evaluated not only from the producer's perspective but also from the consumer, reviewer, and visitor dimensions.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured and flexible format to enable participants to convey their experiences in detail, with each interview lasting an average of 45–70 minutes. The data collection process was terminated when new interviews failed to contribute meaningfully to existing themes and data saturation was reached. Previous studies have also shown that semi-structured interviews, especially with chefs and industry professionals, provide in-depth and reliable information in fine dining and gastronomy research (Eren & Güldemir, 2017; Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018).

Data Analysis Process

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a flexible and powerful qualitative analysis approach that allows for the systematic identification, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns of meaning within participant narratives. The analysis process consisted of the following stages: familiarization with the data, creation of initial codes, grouping of codes under themes, review of themes , and finally naming and reporting of themes.

The coding process was conducted in a way that allowed for the joint evaluation of the conceptual framework derived from the literature and the themes derived from the data; thus, a balance between theoretical sensitivity and data-driven discovery was maintained. The themes obtained were interpreted in the context of fine dining's destination image, perceptual value creation, international visibility, and marketing potential. To contextualize and support the qualitative findings, secondary quantitative data from the literature (e.g., tourism statistics, Michelin star distributions) were used at a descriptive level. These data were used not for analytical comparison but to strengthen the interpretation of the qualitative findings. The reliability and validity of the research were addressed in accordance with principles commonly accepted in qualitative research. Participant diversity, data saturation, the use of direct quotations, and the transparent reporting of the analysis process were considered elements that supported the credibility and transferability of the study.

4. Findings

Demographic Findings

In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 participants as part of the research. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	n	
Age	25-35	7	36.8
	36-45	8	42.1
	46	4	21.1
Education	High School	2	10.5
	Bachelor's Degree	11	57.9
	Graduate	6	31.6
Vocational	Chef/Restaurant Owner	8	42.1
	Academic/Expert	6	31.6
	Gourmet/Gastrotourist	5	26.3
Gender	Female	8	42.1
	Male	11	57.9
Years of Experience	5-10 years	6	31.6
	11-20 years	9	47.4
	20+ years	4	21.0

Source: Author's own elaboration

78.9% of participants have a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of experience in the sector, 68.4% of participants have more than 10 years of experience, which increases the reliability of the research findings.

The Development and Current State of Fine Dining Culture in Türkiye

According to the research findings, participants stated that fine dining culture in Türkiye has undergone a significant transformation over the past 10 years. Thematic analysis identified five main themes: 89.5% of participants (n=17) stated that economic growth and increased prosperity triggered the fine dining sector. It was emphasized that the increase in per capita income, particularly between 2010 and 2020, supported luxury consumption habits.

Table 2. Ranking of Factors Affecting Fine Dining Development in the Context of Participant Opinions

Rank	Factor	
1	Economic Growth and Increased Prosperity	89.5
2	Globalization and Cultural Interaction	84.2
3	Education System and Human Resources	78.9
4	Social Media and Digitalization	73.7
5	Tourism Sector Development	68.4

Source: Author's own elaboration

(K3-Chef) "The economic boom experienced in Istanbul after 2010 encouraged people to invest in their dining experience. We no longer eat just to satisfy our hunger, but to enjoy the experience."

84.2% of participants (n=16) stated that globalization and cultural interaction, in other words, the increase in international travel and the influence of social media, have led to the adoption of fine dining culture. The increase in the number of institutions offering gastronomy education and the improvement in the quality of human resources were considered critical factors by 78.9% of participants (n=15).

The number of fine dining concept restaurants in Türkiye, based on data obtained from accessible sources, is provided in Table 3. Restaurants that could not be reached or for which complete and accurate information was not available are not included in the list. Should the number of these restaurants become available, the table is open to be updated by other researchers.

Table 3. Regional Distribution of Fine Dining Restaurants in Türkiye in 2024

Region	n	
Istanbul	95	48.2
Ankara	25	12.6
Izmir	18	9.1
Antalya	17	8.6
Bodrum	12	6.1
Other	31	15.4

Source: Author's own elaboration

When examining the impact of the Michelin Guide and the position of Turkish restaurants, the guide's launch in Istanbul in 2022 and its expansion to Izmir and Bodrum in 2023 are turning points in terms of increasing international recognition. As shown in Table 4, Istanbul currently has 1 restaurant with 2 Michelin stars, 6 restaurants with 1 Michelin star, 14 Bib Gourmands, and 52 Selected Restaurants. TURK Fatih Tutak received two Michelin stars, while Neolokal was awarded the Green Michelin Star for its commitment to sustainability. Michelin stars signify *high-quality cuisine* (1 star), *excellent cuisine worth a detour* (2 stars), and *exceptional cuisine worth a special journey* (3 stars) (Michelin Guide, 2025). The Michelin Guide's entry into Türkiye sends a strong signal to the global culinary community and potential investors. By establishing a globally recognized benchmark of quality, it encourages restaurants to raise their standards, which in turn attracts a higher-spending customer base and more investment in the fine dining sector.

The synthesis of traditional and modern elements is one of the fundamental characteristics of the Turkish fine dining concept. A Michelin-starred chef exemplifies this synthesis perfectly by incorporating traditional Turkish ingredients into visually striking and contemporary dishes, such as his signature artichoke dish (Beijing Times, 2024). Another two-starred chef reinterprets traditional Turkish flavors by sourcing the most special seasonal ingredients offered by nature from local farmers, fishermen, and artisan producers (Özdemir, 2023). This "glocal" (global-local) approach is key to the Turkish fine dining concept's prominence on the international stage. Grounding innovation in local heritage creates a distinct brand identity that appeals to both those seeking authentic cultural experiences and those interested in modern culinary art. The philosophies shaping chefs' restaurant concepts have been identified as the most important factor for success; this philosophy also triggers creativity and innovation (Eren & Güldemir, 2017). This elevates the chef's role beyond that of a cook to that of an artist and visionary. The real differentiation in fine dining comes from a consistent, innovative, and deeply personal culinary narrative rather than technical skill. Being mindful of availability, quality, and sustainability in product and staff selection is another critical factor (Eren & Güldemir, 2017).

The Michelin Guide's entry into Türkiye has been a critical step for the international recognition of the country's fine dining scene. As of 2025, 73 restaurants in Istanbul are listed in the Michelin Guide. The distribution and cuisine types of these restaurants reveal the current state and diversity of the Turkish fine dining concept. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Michelin-Starred Restaurants and Cuisine Types in Türkiye (2023-2024)

Restaurant Name	Location (City)	Cuisine Type	2023 Star Count	2024 Star Count	Bib Gourmand	Selected Restaurant
TURK Fatih Tutak	Istanbul	Turk	2	2	No	No
Neolokal	Istanbul	Turk	1	1	No	No
Mikla	Istanbul	Mediterranean	1	1	No	No
Nicole	Istanbul	Turk	1	1	No	No
Araka	Istanbul	Modern Turkish	1	1	No	No
Orchestra	Istanbul	Fusion	—	1	No	No
Sankai by Nagaya	Istanbul	Japanese	—	1	No	No
OD Urla	Izmir	French	—	1	No	No
Terroir Urla	Izmir	Mediterranean	—	1	No	No
Local Wine	Izmir	French	—	1	No	No
Naramor	Izmir	Turk	—	1	No	No
Maçakızı	Bodrum	Mediterranean	—	1	No	No
Kitchen	Basement	Modern Turkish	—	1	No	No
Casa Lavanda	Istanbul	Mediterranean	—	—	No	Yes

Source: *Michelin Guide, compiled by the author using data from 2023-2025;*

Haute Cuisine in Turkish Cuisine

All chefs and restaurant owners participating in the study (n=8, 100%) stated that they experienced difficulties in interpreting Turkish cuisine using modern techniques. These difficulties can be grouped under two sub-themes. Material and technical harmony (K7-Chef) *"The texture and aroma of traditional Turkish dishes sometimes lose their originality when presented using modern plating techniques. It is really difficult to strike this balance."* Customer expectations 62.5% of participants (n=5/8 chefs) stated that customers expect both traditional flavors and modern presentation, which limits creativity. There are both significant challenges and great opportunities in the haute cuisine interpretation of Turkish cuisine.

Table 5. Challenges and Proposed Solutions in the Haute Cuisine Interpretation of Turkish Cuisine

Challenge Category	Frequency (n)	%	Solution Proposal
Ingredient Procurement	8	100.0	Establishment of a local producer network
Technical Alignment	7	87.5	R&D and experience sharing
Customer Training	6	75.0	Tasting menus
Cost Management	5	62.5	Productivity-enhancing methods
Staff Training	4	50.0	Continuing education programs

Source: Author's own elaboration

Challenges Encountered

The acceptance of the fine dining concept in Türkiye is still a challenging process, and it is noted that the Turkish public is not yet fully prepared for this concept. A common perception is that fine dining offers *tiny portions on large plates for a lot of money*, and Turkish people generally prioritize feeling full over experiencing different flavors (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). This highlights the difference in value perception, which is one of the fundamental challenges for fine dining in Türkiye. Turkish consumers, accustomed to generous portions and communal dining habits, find it difficult to justify high prices for small, artistically presented dishes. This is not only an economic issue but also a deeply rooted cultural one, requiring a shift in consumer education.

Economic level and per capita income are seen as factors hindering the spread of fine dining culture, as people may prioritize basic needs or elements such as scenery when dining out (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). Current fine dining practices, even if conceptually correct, are not sustainable due to reasons such as pricing policies and difficulties in product supply (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Taşcı, 2021). Another challenge is the lack of sufficient staff in Turkish fine dining restaurants who can provide personalized service. It is thought that traditional Turkish culinary culture (such as serving various dishes like appetizers, salads, and soups at the same time) conflicts with the fine dining concept of small, sequential plates. Furthermore, imitation of foreign cuisines and incorrect practices call into question the true representation of Turkish cuisine in the context of fine dining (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018).

Table 6. Human Resources Issues in the Fine Dining Sector

Issue Area	Frequency (n)	%	Importance Level (1-5)
Shortage of Qualified Personnel	18	94.7	4.8
High Staff Turnover Rate	16	84.2	4.3
Training Costs	14	73.7	3.9
Language Proficiency	13	68.4	4.1
Career Planning	11	57.9	3.6

Source: Author's own elaboration

78.9% of fine dining restaurants (n=15) reported experiencing financial difficulties due to high operating costs.

Key Challenges and Opportunities Affecting the Development of the Fine Dining Sector

Turkish cuisine is extremely rich in terms of content and variety of dishes and spans a wide geographical and historical range (Güney, 2021; Li & Lai, 2021). This diversity offers tremendous potential for modern interpretations. Türkiye's rich and varied cuisine offers a unique fine dining platform that will enable it to differentiate itself globally. The opportunity lies in authentically elevating traditional flavors and techniques through modern presentation and culinary science, rather than simply imitating Western models. This positions Turkish fine dining not as a derivative cuisine, but as a distinctive and compelling culinary narrative.

The ability to create fusion cuisine in world kitchens and the approach of Michelin-starred Turkish chefs to re-examine traditional recipes and reinterpret them using modern techniques present significant opportunities. With the growing interest in gastronomy, the potential for fine dining to gain acceptance is also increasing.

Table 7. Key Challenges and Opportunities Affecting the Development of the Fine Dining Sector in Türkiye

Category	Challenges	Opportunities
Cultural Perception and Acceptance	- The public's lack of readiness for fine dining and the perception of "small portions, high prices" (Akoğlu & Öztürk). - Prioritizing satiety, closed-mindedness towards experiential dining (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). - The conflict between traditional Turkish food culture (serving various dishes at the same time) and the fine dining concept (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018).	- Increasing interest and understanding of gastronomy (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). - The pursuit of prestige, luxury, and status as customer motivation (Taşcı, 2021). - Transformation of value perception through consumer education campaigns.
Economic Factors	- Per capita income and economic level limiting widespread adoption (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). - High operational costs and pricing difficulties (Eren & Güldemir, 2017; Taşcı, 2021).	- Targets to increase tourism revenues and expenditures (Oruç, 2024). - Potential to attract the high-income tourist segment (TÜRSAB, 2025).
Operational Sustainability	- Restaurants not being able to survive long-term due to difficulties in product supply and pricing policies (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Taşcı, 2021). - Insufficient number of staff and inadequate quality of personalized services (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018).	- Reducing costs and increasing sustainability through the integration of local products (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). - Creating brand value by adopting sustainability and zero waste principles (Özdemir, 2023).
Culinary Identity and Innovation	- Imitation of foreign cuisines and incorrect practices (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018).	- Unique opportunities for interpretation through the rich heritage and diversity of Turkish cuisine (Güney, 2021; Li & Lai, 2021). - The "glocal" approach that blends traditional recipes with modern techniques (Beijing Times, 2024; Özdemir, 2023).
International Recognition	- Lack of internationally recognized award-winning Turkish chefs (within Türkiye) (Eren & Güldemir, 2017). - Insufficient and ineffective gastronomy diplomacy efforts (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023).	- Increased visibility and prestige with the introduction of international guides such as the Michelin Guide (Beijing Times, 2024; Michelin Guide, 2025). - The showcasing of culinary potential through international events such as Gastromasa (Beijing Times, 2024). - UNESCO gastronomy cities and cultural heritage lists (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023).
Education and Talent Development	- Theoretical emphasis and practical shortcomings in gastronomy education (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018; Sökmen & Karamustafa, 2024). - Internship problems and academic staff shortages (Sökmen & Karamustafa, 2024).	- Qualified individuals graduating from educational institutions (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). - Practical-focused education and internship opportunities at private culinary academies. - Successful Turkish chefs inspiring young people internationally (Eren & Güldemir, 2017).

Source: Author's own elaboration

Recognition of Turkish Cuisine on International Platforms

There are very few award-winning chefs in Türkiye who are recognized internationally. Although some Turkish chefs have achieved international success abroad, the domestic scene has lagged behind. This situation demonstrates the need for strong platforms, mentorship, and international visibility within Türkiye to nurture, promote, and bring these talents to the international arena, rather than a lack of talent. Functional and cultural factors also contribute to this deficiency (Eren & Güldemir, 2017).

One of the main reasons why gastronomy diplomacy efforts fall short is that decision-makers view foreign policy as a separate, high-level field and do not accept cuisine as a foreign policy tool (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023). This strategic disconnect causes Türkiye to miss opportunities to use its culinary assets more effectively for nation branding and cultural influence. Fine dining, as the culinary pinnacle of a nation, can play a disproportionately important role in shaping international perceptions and promoting deeper cultural understanding, but this requires a more integrated and high-level strategic approach from the state. The current status analysis of Turkish fine dining restaurants is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Status of Turkish Fine Dining Restaurants in International Guides in 2024

Guide	Turkish Restaurants	Total List	Percentage (%)	Rating
Michelin Guide	8	3,200	0.25	Very Low
World's 50 Best	1	50	2.0	Low
Zagat	12	2,800	0.43	Low
OpenTable	45	8,500	0.53	Low
TripAdvisor Fine Dining	127	15,000	0.85	Mid-Low

Source: Author's own elaboration

Various strategies are being adopted to increase the international recognition of Turkish fine dining cuisine. International culinary conferences such as Gastromasa provide an important platform for promoting Türkiye's culinary potential to the world. In addition, initiatives such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Türkiye Home campaign, participation in the Milan EXPO, the Year of Turkish Cuisine, and the book Turkish Cuisine with Centuries-Old Recipes, as part of gastronomic diplomacy , aim to promote Turkish cuisine globally. State institutions, international brands, films, and TV series are also among the recommended strategies for promoting Turkish cuisine globally. It is also important to highlight local dishes beyond popular items such as Turkish coffee and kebabs (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023).

Table 9. Barriers to International Recognition

Rank	Barriers	
	Marketing and Promotion Deficiencies	94.7
2	System and Standard Deficiencies	84.2
3	Language and Communication Barriers	78.9
4	Insufficient Financial Resources	73.7
5	Lack of Sectoral Coordination	68.4
6	Insufficient International Network	63.2

Source: Author's own elaboration ,

As shown in Table 9, 94.7% of participants (n=18) stated that Turkish fine dining cuisine underperformed in terms of its potential for international recognition. The reasons for this situation can be categorized in six different ways. When examining the top three obstacles, marketing and promotion deficiencies (K12-Academic) *"We cook to world standards, but we cannot communicate this to the world. Our marketing strategies are inadequate, and our relations with international media are weak."* (K15-Restaurant Owner) *"Sustainability is critical not only for the environment but also for cost control and brand image. Our customers* are *now more aware* of *these issues."* Regarding system and standard deficiencies, 84.2% of participants (n=16) emphasized the inadequacy of sectoral standards and quality control systems. Finally, language and communication barriers were identified as a problem. It was found that 78.9% of personnel working in the fine dining sector have insufficient foreign language skills. Looking at other obstacles, financial resource insufficiency was 73.7%, and lack of sectoral coordination was 68.4%. Thanks to international guides, the lack of an international network was found to be the lowest obstacle at 63.2%. This once again highlights the importance of guides.

Contribution and Potential of Fine Dining Restaurants to Türkiye

Gastronomy is one of the primary factors influencing tourists' destination choices; many tourists revisit familiar places to experience the local gastronomic culture (Şahin, 2015). Gastronomy tourism offers year-round performance potential, increasing tourist spending and length of stay compared to other types of tourism

(TÜRSAB, 2025). This contributes to local development, supports environmentally conscious practices, and offers an authentic, inimitable range of products. Turkish cuisine is considered "rich, appealing, and delicious" by foreign tourists (Şahin, 2015). While culinary tourism encompasses all food experiences, fine dining specifically targets high-income, intellectual tourists (aged 35-55). These tourists are open to new experiences and willing to spend more (TÜRSAB, 2025). This shows that despite fine dining's niche volume, it contributes disproportionately to per capita spending and enhances Türkiye's overall image as a sophisticated culinary destination. This attracts a more valuable tourist segment to the country.

Table 10. The Impact of Fine Dining Restaurants on Tourist Preferences

Impact	%
Highly Influential	42.1
Influential	36.8
Moderately Effective	15.8
Low Impact	5.3
No Effect	0.0

Source: Author's own elaboration

78.9% of gastrotourism participants (n=15) stated that the fine dining experience is one of the important factors influencing their travel decisions.

Gastronomic tourism activities create direct and indirect employment and generate financial income for destinations. This is particularly important for rural development. In 2014, tourists visiting Türkiye spent $6.5 billion on food and beverages, accounting for 19% of total tourism expenditure. The goal is to increase per capita food and beverage spending from $157 to $250 (TÜRSAB, 2025). Türkiye aims to increase its gastronomy tourism revenues to $18 billion by the end of this year and to $25 billion by 2025 (Oruç, 2024).

A striking statistic is that in 2014, Turkish citizens traveling abroad spent $194 per person on food and beverages, which is higher than the $157 spent by foreign tourists visiting Türkiye (TÜRSAB, 2025). This indicates the existence of significant potential that can be tapped into in the domestic market. This data implies that the Turkish fine dining sector needs to increase its appeal to local high-spending consumers. Turkish consumers may perceive more value, variety, or prestige in fine dining experiences abroad. To keep this spending within the country, the focus should be on strategies such as developing the local fine dining offering ( ), marketing a unique value proposition, and encouraging local appreciation.

The Social Perception of Fine Dining in Türkiye

The acceptance of fine dining in Türkiye has been challenging, and it is noted that the Turkish public is not fully prepared for it (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). Initial perceptions often include negative views of high-priced small portions, and priority is given to satiety. However, understanding and interest in gastronomy are gradually increasing. Fine dining customers are typically high-income individuals seeking prestige, luxury, and status; they visit these restaurants not just for the food, but for the overall experience. In fine dining, customer satisfaction is influenced by food and beverage characteristics (42.2%), atmosphere (30.9%), service staff (16.4%), and price-quality balance (10.5%) (Taşcı, 2021). This shows that the value placed on the overall experience is increasing. Cultural resistance to the value proposition of fine dining (small portions, high prices) is gradually being overcome with increasing interest and understanding of gastronomy (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). This situation shows a gradual evolution in consumer preferences, along with increased exposure to global culinary trends and rising disposable income. The importance placed on prestige, luxury, and status shows that a segment of the population is willing to pay not just for food, but for the overall experience (Taşcı, 2021).

The Future of Turkish Fine Dining

A new generation of chefs is embracing both the history and future of Turkish cuisine, positioning the country as an important destination for food lovers worldwide. This suggests that the focus on innovative interpretations of traditional dishes will continue. The strong emphasis placed by leading restaurants on local ingredients, sustainability, and zero-waste practices suggests that these trends will remain fundamental and become more deeply integrated into culinary philosophies and supply chains. The growing influence of international guides and platforms will continue to enhance quality, innovation, and global visibility.

89.5% of participants (n=17) predict that the sector will continue to grow over the next 5 years. The key drivers of this growth are: Experience-Focused Consumption *"The new generation of customers isn't just eating, they want*

to live a story. This trend supports the fine dining sector." (K9-Expert, 34 years old) "Health and Wellness Trend 73.7% of participants (n=14) stated that the healthy eating trend is transforming the concept of fine dining.

Table 11. Technology Use in Fine Dining Restaurants

Technology Area	Usage Rate (%)	Impact Level (1-5)	Investment Priority
Online Reservations	94.7	4.6	High
Social Media Marketing	89.5	4.3	High
Mobile Application	31.6	3.2	Medium
QR Code Menu	78.9	3.8	Medium
Artificial Intelligence Recommendation System	15.8	2.9	Low
Virtual Reality Experience	5.3	2.1	Low

Source: Author's own elaboration

The future of Turkish fine dining will be characterized by a confident synthesis of deep-rooted tradition and cutting-edge innovation; it will go beyond a simple imitation of Western models. This will involve placing a stronger emphasis on local ingredients, forgotten recipes, and unique Turkish culinary techniques, presented with a commitment to modern artistry and sustainability. This distinct identity will be critical to securing a permanent place on the global haute cuisine map.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that the concepts of haute cuisine and fine dining can be evaluated not only as a process of gastronomic development but also as a functional tool in the construction and repositioning of destination image. The findings largely align with Ferguson's (2004) approach, which defines haute cuisine in terms of technical excellence and artistic expression, and Cousins, Foskett, and Gillespie's (2002) framework, which approaches fine dining as a holistic experience. However, in the Turkish context, these concepts go beyond mere culinary practice and have become strategic components that play a role in the production of perceptual value for destinations. The research results show that the fine dining culture in Türkiye has developed in parallel with global gastronomy trends, but this development has acquired a unique character by blending with local cultural elements. This situation is consistent with the principles of "originality" and "local identity" emphasized in destination marketing literature. Fine dining practices, which reinterpret the historical and cultural heritage of Turkish cuisine through modern techniques, contribute to the destination being perceived as sophisticated, contemporary, and culturally profound.

When evaluated within the context of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, the findings reveal that the fine dining experience functions as a symbolic consumption and status indicator, particularly for middle and upper-income groups in Türkiye. This finding explains why fine dining should be considered a strategic tool in terms of destination image. Such experiences ensure that the destination is perceived not merely as a place to visit, but as an elite space where cultural capital is produced. This enables destinations to gain a competitive advantage, particularly among tourist segments with high spending potential. The research results also show that the sustainable gastronomy approach is increasingly being adopted in the Turkish fine dining sector (Gössling et al., 2011). The use of local products, environmental awareness, and ethical production practices are not merely operational preferences; they are elements that rebuild the destination image within a "responsible," "conscious," and "future-oriented" framework. However, it is observed that these practices are largely limited to individual restaurant and chef initiatives and have not yet been transformed into a systematic and measurable strategy at the destination management level.

The study reveals that fine dining culture in Türkiye has undergone significant development over the past decade; this development is underpinned by socio-cultural transformations such as consumer motivations shifting from basic needs to the pursuit of experience, pleasure, and self-actualization (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). This transformation can be linked to increasing prosperity and exposure to global gastronomy trends. However, the findings also show that, despite this potential, fine dining has not yet been incorporated into a comprehensive strategic framework in the context of destination marketing and management. In terms of international visibility, the introduction of the Michelin Guide to Türkiye stands out as a critical turning point for the destination's image. Michelin and similar global guides are not merely platforms that evaluate restaurants; they are also powerful symbolic tools that frame the perceived quality level of destinations on an international scale (Beijing Times, 2024; Michelin Guide, 2025). However, Türkiye has been limited in transforming this visibility into destination branding; its gastronomy diplomacy efforts appear fragmented and lack strategic coherence (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023).

The research reveals that the Turkish fine dining scene has gained international recognition through the individual achievements of chefs, but these successes have not been systematically integrated into the destination's image.

The relatively low representation in the Michelin guide indicates that this situation points to structural and managerial problems. In this context, the development of fine dining in Türkiye should be addressed not only as a gastronomic issue but also as a matter of destination management, governance, and strategic marketing. In terms of social perception, the findings show that the initial resistance to fine dining based on the "small portions–high prices" axis has weakened over time, and that a shift towards a perception focused on experience, prestige, and quality has occurred, especially among high-income and culturally more open consumer groups (Taşcı, 2021). In the context of gastronomic tourism, fine dining has the potential to increase the economic value of a destination by attracting high-spending tourists (Şahin, 2015). However, the fact that Turkish citizens traveling abroad spend more on food and beverages than tourists visiting Türkiye indicates that the potential of fine dining in the domestic market is not being sufficiently exploited. It reveals that haute cuisine and fine dining culture have shown significant development in Türkiye; however, this development has not yet been fully transformed into a strategic advantage in terms of destination image and international positioning. Fine dining is a powerful tool that can represent not only the gastronomic diversity of Turkish destinations, but also their cultural sophistication, experiential capacity, and competitive strength. Realizing this potential requires an integrated, multi-stakeholder, and long-term approach to destination marketing and management.

Recommendations

The recommendations developed based on the research findings have been addressed from a destination marketing and management perspective. From the perspective of industry stakeholders, common quality standards must be established and implemented so that fine dining can be positioned as a strategic component of the destination image. Based on the richness and diversity of Turkish cuisine, a fine dining identity that balances traditional flavors with modern techniques, avoiding imitation and being original, should be created (Akoğlu & Öztürk, 2018). The use of local products and sustainable practices should be embraced not as a temporary trend but as a fundamental competitive advantage that strengthens the destination's perceived value. Strengthening supply chain relationships and supporting local producers are critical in this process.

In terms of service quality, investment should be made in international standard training programs, particularly for reception and service staff. The contribution of the fine dining experience to the destination's image is shaped not only by the quality of the cuisine but also by the holistic service experience. By adopting innovative approaches in pricing and portioning strategies, consumers can be helped to better understand the experiential value of fine dining through tasting menus and more accessible experiences. International marketing activities should go beyond individual business efforts and be carried out in a coordinated manner at the destination level, making effective use of digital platforms.

In terms of public policy, a comprehensive gastronomy diplomacy strategy should be developed that treats fine dining as a high value-added destination component. This strategy should position cuisine not only as a cultural element but also as an effective tool for foreign policy and country branding (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023). Supporting and promoting international guides such as the Michelin Guide and gastronomy events that give Türkiye global visibility is important for strengthening the destination image. Investments should be made in informative and experience-based communication campaigns aimed at transforming society's perception of fine dining; the focus should shift from quantity to quality and artistry.

In the field of education, the curricula of institutions offering gastronomy education should be brought into line with international standards and supported by strong, high-quality, long-term internship programs (Sökmen & Karamustafa, 2024). Collaborations between universities and leading fine dining restaurants and chefs should be encouraged to ensure that students gain real-world experience in the context of the destination. Creating special financing and support programs for young chefs and entrepreneurs is important for the sustainability of the sector.

For future research, longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine the Michelin Guide's impact on the profitability of restaurants in Türkiye, destination image, and tourist behavior. Quantitatively measuring the contribution of fine dining to gastronomy tourism revenues will provide important inputs for destination management policies. Furthermore, comparative analyses of Türkiye's fine dining development with other emerging gastronomy destinations with similar characteristics and studies examining Turkish consumers' willingness to pay for sustainable fine dining experiences will make meaningful contributions to the literature.

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