

Research Article

Rendang as a Culinary Tourism Magnet: Leveraging Indonesia's Best Food for Destination Branding and Economic Impact in West Sumatra

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Abstract: This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to critically assess the strategic utility of Rendang (the globally celebrated Minangkabau dish) as a central asset for culinary tourism, destination branding, and regional economic development in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The analysis systematically synthesizes evidence concerning the dish's gastronomic, socio-cultural, and economic impacts, framed within three core thematic areas: Socio-Cultural Rigor, Gastronomic Innovation, and Destination Branding and Value Creation. Findings confirm that Rendang's recurring recognition as a world-class dish provides a powerful competitive edge. Its success is fundamentally rooted in its unique flavor profile, its adaptability, and its deep cultural significance, embodying Minangkabau philosophical virtues. Strategically, Rendang functions as a potent vehicle for destination branding, transforming passive consumption into active cultural immersion through integrated culinary tourism experiences. Economically, the Rendang industry in hubs like Payakumbuh fosters measurable growth by supporting local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), generating value-added products, and strengthening the regional tourism supply chain. The study concludes that Rendang is an indispensable asset for Indonesia's competitive advantage, requiring sustained policy support for SME capacity, integrated tourism product development, and the long-term maintenance of cultural authenticity within sustainable and Halal tourism frameworks.

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1. Introduction

Rendang, born in the kitchens of the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra, stands not merely as a dish, but as a rich cultural narrative set in motion. This Indonesian culinary treasure has transcended its origins, capturing global attention for its deep, complex flavors and the profound heritage it embodies (Nurmufida *et al.*, 2017; Fatimah *et al.*, 2021). Its defining moment came with its recurring crowning as the world's most delicious food by CNN (Rahman, 2020; Faridah *et al.*, 2024). This unparalleled international acclaim has proven to be a strategic turning point, enabling Rendang to evolve from a source of national pride into a

powerful, tangible asset for destination branding and generating substantial economic returns within West Sumatra (Antoni *et al.*, 2019).



Figure 1. Rendang.

Source: The House of Lemang (2022)

The essence of Rendang lies in its distinctive, almost ritualistic, preparation. It is the result of a long, slow-cooking process (a patient marriage of beef, creamy coconut milk, and an intricate blend of aromatic spices) that not only yields an intense, multi-layered flavor profile but also naturally grants the dish exceptional preservation qualities (Nurmufida *et al.*, 2017). Yet, Rendang's genius lies in its adaptability. While traditionally beef-based, the Minangkabau people have skillfully diversified its composition, developing local innovations like rendang daun kayu (wood leaf rendang) and incorporating other ingredients (Rusdi *et al.*, 2024; Fatimah *et al.*, 2021). This versatility showcases culinary resourcefulness, ensuring the dish's survival and relevance while reinforcing its stature as a dynamic and sustainable cultural food product.

The magnetic pull of Rendang on the global palate translates directly into measurable economic momentum for its home region. By attracting high-value culinary tourists eager to taste the authentic source, Rendang effectively boosts the regional tourism economy (Wondirad *et al.*, 2021). The industry built around this dish, particularly in hubs like Payakumbuh, has flourished, transforming into a vital economic sector that produces various value-added Rendang products, thereby increasing the competitiveness and innovation of the local food scene (Suresti *et al.*, 2021). When strategically woven into destination branding and Halal tourism initiatives, Rendang serves as a cornerstone of trust, which encourages tourists to return, ultimately maximizing the positive economic footprint on West Sumatra (Surya *et al.*, 2018; Antoni *et al.*, 2019).

To understand Rendang is to understand the Minangkabau worldview. Far from being simple sustenance, the dish is a cultural vessel, symbolizing fundamental virtues such as patience, sincerity, and collective wisdom. Its preparation is often reserved for significant communal and ceremonial events (Nurmufida *et al.*, 2017; Ermanto *et al.*, 2025). The deep cultural narratives embedded in the Rendang-making process (stories of community, tradition, and

philosophy) profoundly enrich the experience of cultural tourists, providing a meaningful layer of immersion that goes beyond mere consumption (Ermanto *et al.*, 2025; Wondirad *et al.*, 2021). By actively championing this cultural heritage, West Sumatra cements its unique identity, successfully transforming the dish into a powerful cultural and gastronomic ambassador (Fatimah *et al.*, 2021).

Leveraging Rendang as a central culinary tourism asset grants West Sumatra a unique and potent means to strengthen its destination brand and catalyze substantial economic growth. Its world-class recognition, coupled with its culinary versatility and deep cultural roots, makes it the ideal symbol for promoting the region's rich heritage. By thoughtfully integrating Rendang into tourism policy and emphasizing its enduring cultural essence, West Sumatra can guarantee sustained tourist engagement, support local economic prosperity, and safeguard its cultural identity for future generations.

This study aims to identify the primary factors underpinning Rendang's status as a global gastronomic phenomenon and critically assess its utility as a strategic tool for Indonesian culinary tourism, destination branding, and visitor experience enhancement.

2. Proposed Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, recognized for its rigorous and objective approach to synthesizing existing evidence. The SLR framework ensures a comprehensive and reproducible analysis by systematically identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all available scholarly and industry publications related to the role of Rendang as a culinary tourism magnet. This approach allows for an evidence-based assessment of the dish's gastronomic, socio-cultural, and economic impacts, particularly within the context of West Sumatra's destination branding strategy (Liberati *et al.*, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The final synthesis will generate a comprehensive narrative and identify critical research gaps within the domain.

Data Collection Method

The execution of the literature search was meticulously designed to ensure both comprehensive academic rigor and contextual relevance. The search strategy involved triangulating data retrieved from three distinct categories of sources. Firstly, International Databases specifically Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Springer were systematically searched, leveraging their strong indexing of high-quality, peer-reviewed international journals to establish the global academic consensus and theoretical frameworks. Secondly, Search Engines such as Google Scholar were utilized to conduct exploratory searches, ensuring the capture of seminal works and tracking the broader citation context, particularly for articles that may span multiple disciplines. Thirdly, to ground the findings contextually, National Repositories like Garuda Kemendikbud were included to provide comprehensive coverage of Indonesia-

specific, peer-reviewed research and contextual studies, crucial for understanding local dynamics. Furthermore, recognizing the vital role of global image in tourism, select Industry and Media Sources (e.g., CNN, TasteAtlas) were incorporated as secondary data sources to contextualize the global perception and external recognition of Rendang, which is a key element for the analysis of destination branding.

Search String, Keywords, and Timeline

To ensure both maximum recall (breadth of coverage) and precision (relevance), a structured search string employing Boolean operators (AND/OR) was developed. The search terms were categorized into three key thematic clusters. The Core Subject was defined by searching for "Rendang" combined with related terms ("Minangkabau cuisine" OR "Indonesian cuisine"). This core was then intersected with the Tourism Focus cluster, which utilized broad terms like ("Culinary tourism" OR "Gastronomy tourism" OR "Food tourism") to capture diverse academic interpretations of food-related travel. Finally, the search was further refined by intersecting these results with the Impact Focus, specifically targeting the application of Rendang's global appeal to practical outcomes: ("Destination branding" OR "Regional economic impact" OR "MSMEs") AND ("West Sumatra"). This specific targeting ensured that the retrieved literature was highly relevant to the study's aim regarding West Sumatra's economic and branding objectives. The entire search was methodologically confined to the period 2005 to 2024, a timeframe strategically selected to capture research following the documented rise of global culinary diplomacy trends in the mid-2000s and guarantee the currency of information regarding modern tourism and branding strategies.

Screening, Inclusion, and Exclusion Criteria

Following the initial search, screening was performed in two stages: title/abstract screening, followed by full-text review.

Table 1. Screening Table Criteria.

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Source Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, academic books, and official government/tourism industry reports.	Grey literature (e.g., non-peer-reviewed reports, dissertations without published articles).
Language	Documents published in English or Indonesian.	Articles published in languages other than English or Indonesian.
Relevance	Studies directly examining Rendang from tourism, economic, anthropological, or socio-historical perspectives	Research focused purely on technical aspects (e.g., molecular food science, detailed nutritional composition) without linkage to

Scope	relevant to destination promotion.	culinary industry or tourism/culture.
	Literature focused on the region of West Sumatra or the national branding of Indonesia through Rendang.	Studies focusing exclusively on other regional variations of cuisine unrelated to Rendang.

(Source: Author, 2025)

Data Extraction Protocol

Data extraction was standardized using a pre-designed matrix to systematically capture: author(s) and year; journal impact/publisher; study objective; methodology employed; key findings related to Rendang's gastronomic factors (flavor, preservation), cultural values, and specific economic/tourism contributions; and identified research gaps.

Analytical Procedures

The extracted qualitative data, once compiled, was subjected to a rigorous Thematic Content Analysis following the systematic framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). This synthesis method was employed not merely to summarize the literature, but to actively identify and develop conceptual themes that illuminate the strategic utility of Rendang as a tourism asset. The analysis was specifically anchored around three core areas of inquiry crucial for understanding culinary tourism.

The first thematic area, Socio-Cultural Rigor and Tourist Immersion, focused on analyzing the historical, philosophical, and ceremonial significance of Rendang including the inherent values such as patience and cooperation to evaluate its deep-seated potential for providing authentic and meaningful cultural tourism experiences for international visitors.

The analysis then shifted to Gastronomic Innovation and Marketability. Here, research examined the unique physico-chemical factors of the dish (e.g., its rich umami profile and natural preservation/shelf life) alongside ingredient diversification (such as plant-based Rendang options). This rigorous investigation was necessary to assess and document Rendang's intrinsic viability as a scalable and exportable tourism product in the global marketplace.

The final thematic domain explored was Destination Branding and Value Creation. This involved the systematic categorization of evidence demonstrating Rendang's measurable strategic impact. This included assessing its contribution to tourist volume, the enhancement of West Sumatra's visibility, and its documented support for local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and the broader regional economic value chain.

Methodological Triangulation was implemented to increase the confidence and validity of the synthesized findings by cross-verifying key thematic results derived from high-rigor peer-reviewed articles against empirical evidence and global sentiment captured in reputable international media and industry reports.

Data Visualization and Synthesis

To map the spatial and cultural trajectory of the cuisine, the research incorporates Culinary Cartography methods (Pearsall, 2018; Timothy & Ron, 2013). Thematic mapping techniques will be utilized to visually illustrate the dish's development from its Minangkabau origin in West Sumatra to its national consolidation and international reach, thereby establishing the crucial geographical linkage necessary for destination branding analysis.

The findings from the thematic analysis will be synthesized to directly address the study's aim. The final synthesis will construct a comprehensive, evidence-based narrative that strategically positions Rendang as a multi-faceted asset that enhances the competitive advantage and economic trajectory of West Sumatra in the global culinary tourism market.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Rendang's designation as a global culinary champion (Rahman, 2020) provides West Sumatra with a powerful, multi-faceted asset that drives both destination branding and economic development, far exceeding its role as a mere food item.

Rendang's Intrinsic Value and Appeal to the Global Culinary Tourist

Rendang's success as a tourism magnet is fundamentally rooted in its unique gastronomic profile and inherent cultural factors that resonate with modern tourist demands for authenticity and quality. The dish's complex flavor, characterized by a sophisticated blend of spices and prolonged preparation, fosters high customer loyalty and significantly enhances the quality of the gastronomic experience, thereby influencing positive revisit intentions (Edwin *et al.*, 2024; Purnami *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, the adaptability of Rendang, seen in variations like Beef Rendang, Rendang Lokan (oysters), and the plant-based Rendang Daun Kayu (wood leaves), demonstrates the resilience and creativity of Minangkabau cuisine, which appeals to a diverse range of dietary preferences and strengthens regional food security (Fatimah *et al.*, 2021; Rusdi *et al.*, 2024). This culinary versatility enables West Sumatra to offer a broad, attractive product range under a single, globally recognized brand.

Strategic Role in Destination Branding and Cultural Immersion

Rendang serves as a potent vehicle for destination branding by anchoring West Sumatra's identity in a globally recognized cultural artifact. The dish is more than a food product; it is a cultural symbol embodying the adaptability and profound philosophical values of the Minangkabau people, enhancing the region's overall attractiveness (Fatimah *et al.*, 2021; Er-manto *et al.*, 2025). Leveraging this cultural rigor through integrated tourism—such as culinary tours that combine tasting with cultural sites (Henmaidi *et al.*, 2024)—transforms passive consumption into active cultural immersion, reinforcing the authenticity sought by tourists (Er-manto *et al.*, 2025). This integration aligns the high-quality gastronomic experience with cultural storytelling, which is crucial for building a unique and memorable brand image for West Sumatra.

Economic Impact and Benefits to Local Communities

Promoting Rendang tourism generates tangible economic benefits by empowering local communities and strengthening the regional value chain. The Rendang processing industry in areas like Payakumbuh adds significant value to local livestock and agricultural products, contributing substantially to the regional economy and competitiveness; notably, egg rendang and lung rendang are identified as the highest value-added products (Suresti *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, initiatives focused on Rendang can foster crucial job creation and income generation across the tourism supply chain (Mussa, 2022). By strategically involving local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in production, marketing, and cultural demonstrations, tourism revenue is distributed more equitably, supporting community empowerment and the development of local infrastructure (Semil *et al.*, 2020; Munadjat, 2016).

Strategies for Sustainable Culinary Tourism Growth

Sustained growth requires integrating Rendang promotion within frameworks of sustainable and specialized tourism, particularly Halal tourism. Emphasizing Rendang's adherence to Halal standards provides a strong draw for Muslim travelers, aligning with West Sumatra's regional focus and increasing visitor trust (Ulfanora *et al.*, 2023). Strategic recommendations involve transitioning from general promotion to integrated culinary tours and co-creation activities, which boost tourist loyalty and repeat visits (Purnami *et al.*, 2025; Muhammad & Saputra, 2021). Concurrently, strengthening local SME capacity through financial and marketing support is essential to ensure the quality and scale necessary to meet international demand without compromising cultural authenticity, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Rendang tourism brand (Suteja *et al.*, 2021; Semil *et al.*, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This study critically confirms that Rendang, galvanized by its recurring global recognition as the world's best food (Rahman, 2020), functions as a pivotal culinary tourism magnet for West Sumatra, extending far beyond its status as a traditional dish. The intrinsic factors (including its complex flavor profile that fosters high customer loyalty) (Edwin *et al.*, 2024), its cultural significance rooted in Minangkabau philosophical values (Fatimah *et al.*, 2021), and its culinary adaptability (Rusdi *et al.*, 2024) collectively establish Rendang as a high-quality product that aligns perfectly with the contemporary culinary tourist's demand for authentic and memorable experiences.

Strategically, Rendang serves as an immediate and potent vehicle for destination branding, transforming abstract cultural awareness into tangible visitor intent. By leveraging the dish's historical and ceremonial depth through integrated culinary tours (Henmaidi *et al.*, 2024), West Sumatra effectively markets its unique identity and reinforces the authenticity sought by global travelers. Furthermore, the promotion of Rendang generates demonstrable

economic momentum, notably by supporting local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through value-added product creation (Suresti *et al.*, 2021) and fostering job creation across the regional tourism supply chain (Mussa, 2022). Its adherence to Halal standards also positions the region advantageously within the growing specialized Halal tourism market (Ulfanora *et al.*, 2023).

In conclusion, Rendang is an indispensable asset for Indonesia's competitive advantage in the global tourism market. Its successful integration into tourism policy requires sustained efforts focused on strengthening local capacity, promoting co-creation activities (Purnami *et al.*, 2025), and maintaining the delicate balance between commercial scalability and preserving the dish's cultural integrity.

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