

Kota Rempah: Strengthening Ternate's Brand Identity through Gastronomic Souvenirs for a Sustainable Tourism

Kevin Gustian Yulius¹, Nonot Yuliantoro², and Yosep Dudedes Timba³
Faculty of Hospitality & Tourism, Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Ternate is celebrated for its historic spice trade and has recently adopted the *Kota Rempah* brand to promote its culinary heritage in support of sustainable tourism. This study examines 93 local MSMEs and their 48 unique gastronomic souvenirs—from nutmeg and *kenari* confections to seafood preserves—to evaluate their contributions to place identity and inclusive economic growth. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with tourism office and Dekranasda officials, MSME owners, and field observations. Findings reveal that most enterprises cluster in urban districts, a diverse product range rooted in local ingredients, and strong stakeholder interest tempered by challenges in branding consistency, packaging, and geographic reach. The analysis highlights how culinary souvenirs function as cultural carriers, fostering emotional connections, longer visitor stays, and repeat visitation, while also empowering women led businesses and community livelihoods. To harness these opportunities, integrated policy measures are recommended, including shared packaging facilities, cohesive *Kota Rempah* branding guidelines, and expanded support for peripheral areas. Finally, pursuing geographic indication status for key spice products is proposed to protect authenticity, enhance market differentiation, and further advance sustainable tourism development in Ternate.

Keywords: City Branding; Gastronomic Souvenir; Geographic Indication; *Kota Rempah*; Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

In the age of experience-based tourism, cities are increasingly turning to cultural heritage as a foundation for destination branding and sustainable development (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2025; Priporas et al., 2021). Culinary traditions, in particular, have become central to how places present themselves to the world, offering tourists not only flavors but also narratives, identities, and lasting memories (Park & Widyanta, 2022; Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024). Within this global context, the city of Ternate in North Maluku, Indonesia, offers a distinctive case through its official branding as *Kota Rempah* (City of Spices) (Qadriyah et al., 2024), a strategic effort to reclaim its historical identity and position itself in the emerging space of gastronomic and sustainable tourism (Gönüllüoğlu & Arslan Selçuk, 2024; Guo & Hsu, 2023; Pearson & Pearson, 2017).

Ternate is an archipelagic city that spans three major islands—Ternate, Moti, and Batang Dua—and six smaller islands, forming a total of eight administrative districts (*kecamatan*) and seventy-eight sub-districts (*kelurahan*) (BPS Kota Ternate, 2025). The central island, Ternate, houses five urban districts: *Ternate Selatan*, *Ternate Tengah*, *Ternate Barat*,

Ternate Utara, and *Pulau Ternate*, which serve as the city's core in terms of population, economy, and infrastructure (Marasabessy, 2016). The other three districts—*Pulau Hiri*, *Pulau Moti*, and *Pulau Batang Dua*—complement the urban center with coastal communities, spice plantations, and marine-based livelihoods, enriching the cultural and ecological diversity of the municipality.

Tourism in Ternate has shown promising growth in recent years (Nurlaili et al., 2017). Based on data from BPS Kota Ternate (2025), the city received 265,336 domestic and 3,256 international tourists in 2024. Visitors are drawn to 29 registered natural attractions and 6 cultural heritage sites, including volcanic lakes, black-sand beaches, colonial-era forts, and the Sultan's Palace. Culinary tourism is also expanding rapidly, evidenced by the increase in registered restaurants from 195 in 2021 to 490 in 2024, primarily concentrated in the districts of *Ternate Tengah* and *Ternate Selatan*, which are also hubs for hotels, markets, and tourism services (Umasugi & Amin, 2019).

Economically, the culinary sector is supported by a dynamic ecosystem of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Jeandry et al., 2024; Sabuhari et al., 2022). As reported by BPS Kota Ternate (2025), the city is home to over 18,000 registered MSMEs, many of which are involved in food processing, spice packaging, and the production of traditional snacks. This strong foundation provides significant potential for the development of gastronomic souvenirs—locally produced food and beverage items that serve both as cultural expressions and marketable tourism products (Chen et al., 2022; Şahin-Yılmaz & Yılmaz, 2025; Stone, 2024; Suhartanto et al., 2018). These souvenirs not only offer a sensory extension of the tourist experience but also generate income, preserve culinary knowledge, and strengthen place identity (Qiu et al., 2024; Suhartanto et al., 2018).

Ternate's branding as *Kota Rempah* is rooted in its historical legacy as a central node in the global spice trade during the 15th to 17th centuries (Mihardja et al., 2020). The city was once a key producer of cloves and nutmeg and played a pivotal role in maritime trade routes that connected Southeast Asia with Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia (Ajam & Ahmad, 2022; Averbuch, 2022). This heritage remains alive in the form of traditional agricultural practices, spice-infused cuisine, and community rituals, making it highly relevant for modern narratives of sustainability and cultural authenticity (Meranggi, 2024; Nurbaya, 2023). The city's ongoing efforts to be included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, particularly in the field of gastronomy, further illustrate its commitment to aligning heritage and innovation (Pemkot Ternate, 2023).

Gastronomic souvenirs play a central role in translating this branding into tangible, exportable experiences (Qiu et al., 2024). Products such as clove syrup, nutmeg candy, *bagea*, and *sirup pala* represent more than just food items—they are embedded with historical meaning, local knowledge, and place-based values (Chukwurah et al., 2025; Gugerell et al., 2017). Their development and promotion contribute not only to the tourism sector but also to broader creative economy goals, including the empowerment of MSMEs, support for women entrepreneurs, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Irfayanti & Lord, 2024; Királová & Malec, 2021; Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). As demand grows for authentic, sustainable, and ethically produced travel experiences, such souvenirs are becoming key instruments in responsible destination management.

This study aims to explore how gastronomic souvenirs support Ternate's city branding as *Kota Rempah* and contribute to sustainable tourism development. It examines the interconnection between culinary heritage, place identity, and tourism marketing by analyzing the current practices and strategic directions of branding and souvenir production. Finally, the novelty of this research lies in its focus on gastronomic souvenirs not merely as peripheral tourism products but as core components of destination branding, cultural resilience, and economic sustainability in an archipelagic urban setting.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case-study approach to examine how gastronomic souvenirs contribute to strengthening Ternate's Kota Rempah branding and sustainable tourism. A case-study design was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of real-world phenomena within a specific cultural and geographic context (Çakar & Aykol, 2021). The focus on Ternate provided a meaningful setting to investigate the intersection of culinary heritage, destination marketing, and stakeholder collaboration (Husin et al., 2022; Meranggi, 2024; Qadriyah et al., 2024; Tham & Chin, 2024).

Primary data were collected using two main instruments: a semi-structured interview guide and an observation log. The interview guide included open-ended questions on branding practices, product development, marketing challenges, and stakeholder roles. The observation log was used to record practices and settings related to the production, packaging, and presentation of culinary souvenirs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These instruments enabled the researcher to capture both verbal insights and contextual observations relevant to the study. Informants were selected through purposive sampling and included representatives from *Dinas Pariwisata Kota Ternate*, MSME owners in the food and beverage sector, and employees of *Dewan Kerajinan Nasional Daerah* (Dekranasda). These stakeholders were chosen for their direct involvement in tourism promotion, product innovation, and local economic development. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring emerging themes while maintaining consistency in key topics across participants (Aung et al., 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Transcripts and observation notes were reviewed and categorized based on recurring concepts and patterns. Themes were then synthesized to reflect the relationships between branding, culinary heritage, and sustainable tourism goals. Data triangulation was applied across interview and observation sources to enhance validity. The use of multiple data sources and perspectives helped reduce potential bias and support the credibility of the findings (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

RESULT

Profile of Culinary MSMEs in Ternate

Ternate's culinary MSMEs form a vibrant but unevenly structured sector at the intersection of local entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, and tourism development. A total of 93 culinary-related MSMEs have been identified across the city as actively engaged in producing or distributing food and beverage-based souvenirs. These businesses represent various scales of operation—from informal, home-based producers to semi-formal enterprises with

distribution agreements and retail partnerships. Their collective output is central to the local souvenir economy, offering visitors tangible, edible expressions of Ternate's spice heritage and culinary identity.

Institutional support for this sector comes from multiple stakeholders. *Dinas Pariwisata Kota Ternate* (Ternate Tourism Office) plays a leading role by organizing basic training programs and thematic workshops, including specialized modules such as bamboo cooking techniques introduced at Cengkeh Afo restaurant near Mount Gamalama. These initiatives aim to integrate traditional practices into creative economy development, though participation is still limited to a few target groups and lacks systematic follow-up mechanisms. In addition, the office provides informal business consultation and connects MSMEs with tourism promotion activities, albeit in a fragmented manner.

Dekranasda (*Dewan Kerajinan Nasional Daerah*) serves as a complementary actor focused on market access. Through its curated retail outlet, Tara No Ate, Dekranasda facilitates the display and sale of regional products, including culinary items, herbal oils, crafts, and herbal drinks. Currently, the store features approximately 260 products from various MSMEs across North Maluku, providing visibility and a centralized access point for tourists. However, space and turnover limitations mean that only a subset of MSMEs benefit from this retail exposure. At the enterprise level, MSME owners operate with varying levels of formality, branding capability, and market reach. Some businesses—such as Pakesang, which began in 2007—have developed clear identities and diversified product lines over time. Pakesang's growth trajectory illustrates the challenges and opportunities within the sector. It operated for over 15 years before opening its first souvenir shop in 2022, during which time it relied on consignment-based distribution through minimarkets such as Indomaret and Alfamidi. The brand now offers a curated line of *kenari*-based cakes, spiced beverages, and signature packaging, and is among the few to access a broader consumer base across North Maluku.

Retailers such as Indomaret and Alfamidi also serve as distribution channels for select MSME products, though their capacity to absorb artisanal or small-batch items is limited by volume and quality control requirements. Only a few producers are able to meet these standards consistently, often relying on external supply chains for packaging materials and raw ingredients. This results in higher production costs, particularly in Ternate's logistical context as a remote island city in eastern Indonesia.

Despite the diversity and resilience of local producers, the supporting infrastructure for MSME growth remains underdeveloped. Business development services, including access to finance, certification, standardization, and marketing support, are sporadic. Many MSMEs face difficulties in scaling up operations due to inadequate access to equipment, fluctuating ingredient costs, and the absence of a packaging industry tailored to small-scale needs. Trainings, where available, are typically localized, short-term, and focused on individual skills rather than strategic enterprise development.

Product Diversity and Categorization

A detailed mapping of the culinary souvenir sector in Ternate reveals a rich and diverse portfolio of 48 unique products, developed and sold by local MSMEs. These products vary widely in terms of form, preservation methods (e.g., dried, fried, baked, bottled), shelf life, and cultural context. The diversity of product types demonstrates both the adaptive capacity of

local producers and the richness of Ternate's culinary traditions, particularly those centred around spice-based and seafood-derived ingredients. The following table summarizes the categorization of the identified products:

Table 1. Categorization of Gastronomy Souvenirs in Ternate

Category	Examples	Number of Products
Kenari-based goods	<i>Roti kenari, halua kenari, nastar kenari</i>	9
Nutmeg-based products	<i>Permen pala, teh pala, selai pala</i>	12
Fish/Seafood-based	<i>Abon ikan tuna, kecap ikan, cumi rica</i>	7
Baked snacks & cakes	<i>Makron, bagea, kue bilolo kenari</i>	7
Chips & fried snacks	<i>Keripik pisang, keripik bayam, kacang disco</i>	6
Condiments	<i>Sambal roa, sambal ikan tore, sambal pala</i>	3
Infusions & beverages	<i>Teh rempah, minuman sari pala</i>	3
Traditional foods	<i>Sagu tumbu, kue bubur kelapa</i>	2
Herbal/sweet candies	<i>Permen kayu putih, permen pala</i>	2

Source: Primary Data (2025)

This product ecosystem is largely rooted in three key ingredients: *kenari* (canarium nuts), *pala* (nutmeg), and fish or seafood—each of which holds cultural, historical, and economic significance in Ternate. *Kenari* nuts, for example, are featured in both sweet and savory preparations, from traditional cakes like *bagea* and *bakpia* to modern variations like nut brittles and cookies. The versatility of *kenari* allows it to be used in pastries, fried snacks, and baked goods, contributing to both heritage preservation and product innovation.

Nutmeg-based products form the most prominent category, encompassing a wide range of edible forms such as syrup (*sirup pala*), spread (*selai pala*), tea (*teh pala*), candy (*permen pala*), and even sambal (*sambal pala*). This reflects Ternate's deep-rooted association with the spice trade and its ongoing symbolic capital as part of the global clove and nutmeg economy. The prevalence of nutmeg in both savoury and sweet souvenir items also illustrates its integration into daily life and ceremonial cuisine. Fish and seafood products—such as tuna floss (*abon ikan tuna*), fish-based chili pastes (*sambal ikan tore*), and fish sauce (*kecap ikan*)—demonstrate the adaptation of local marine resources into compact, preserved, and transportable souvenir items. These products serve both practical and representational functions: they are consumable reminders of Ternate's maritime culture and its fishing-based economy.

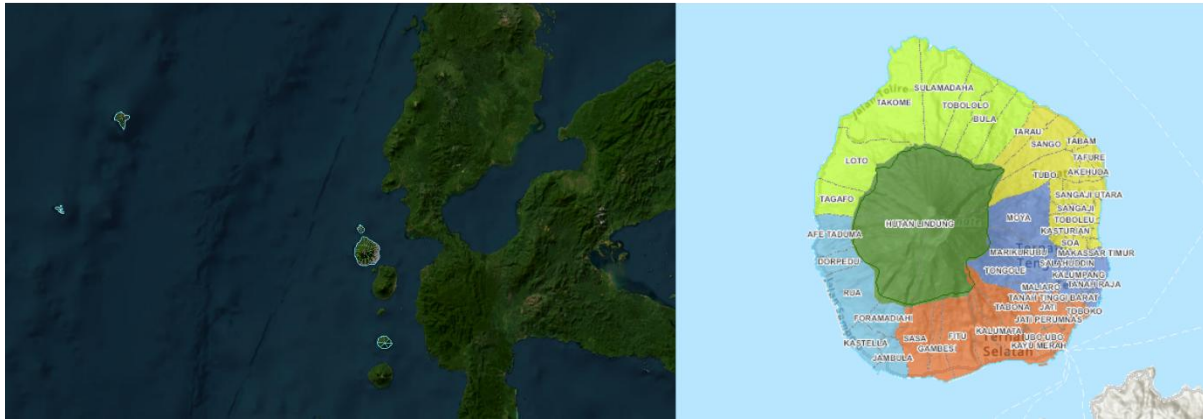
The categories of baked snacks, chips, and traditional foods reflect the influence of local cooking methods and community-specific culinary heritage. For instance, *sagu*-based foods such as *sagu tumbu* and *bagea* are associated with the indigenous foodways of the Maluku Islands and are often served during religious or seasonal celebrations (Wijaya, 2019). Meanwhile, beverages and infusions such as *teh rempah* and *teh daun kelor* represent growing interest in health-oriented and aromatic souvenir options, often marketed for their medicinal or therapeutic properties (Olivero-Verbel et al., 2024). Although fewer in number, these items show potential for expansion given the global trend toward wellness tourism and functional foods.

Geographic Distribution of Culinary MSMEs

Out of the 93 culinary MSMEs identified in Ternate, 90 have documented locations across the city's districts (*kecamatan*), providing a more accurate picture of spatial distribution patterns.

The data reveals a strong concentration of MSMEs in the urban core, with significant disparities in participation between city districts and peripheral areas.

Figure 1. City of Ternate on the Map (Left) and Ternate Island (Right)



Source: ESRI (2025)

Ternate Tengah emerges as the central hub of culinary MSME activity, accounting for nearly half of all documented businesses. This district includes major *kelurahan* such as Maliaro, Tabahawa, and *Makassar Barat*, all of which host multiple MSMEs. The dense urban layout and better access to markets, transportation, and public services make this district the most favorable for culinary entrepreneurship.

Ternate Selatan, the second-largest contributor with 26 MSMEs, also benefits from its proximity to government offices, tourist accommodations, and hospitality services. Areas such as Jati Perumnas, Ngade, and Tabona appear multiple times in the data, indicating active micro-enterprise clusters. *Ternate Utara*, while less densely represented, still hosts 20 MSMEs across *kelurahan* like Soa, Kasturian, and Toboleu. These areas are more residential or peripheral but still maintain strong ties to central trade and distribution routes.

Ternate Barat and Pulau Ternate are notably underrepresented, with five and one MSME respectively. These districts face geographic and infrastructural limitations, including more difficult access to commercial centres and lower tourism footfall. The remaining three MSMEs were undocumented in terms of location at the time of data collection. The spatial concentration in urbanized districts reflects broader trends of economic centralization and unequal access to development infrastructure. This geographic imbalance presents both a challenge and an opportunity for future policy. While central districts benefit from clustering effects and tourism visibility, peripheral areas remain underutilized in the culinary souvenir economy, despite having cultural and ecological assets that could support diversification.

Stakeholder Perspectives and Challenges

Branding Potential and Limitations

Most stakeholders enthusiastically endorsed the *Kota Rempah* concept, viewing it as an authentic umbrella under which all spice-related products—especially gastronomic souvenirs—could gain greater visibility. MSME owners noted that adopting local place names and spice-forward recipes (as Pakesang has done) helps convey regional identity, fostering stronger emotional connections with tourists. Yet, there is currently no dedicated municipal program or budget line that aligns *Kota Rempah* branding with MSME capacity-building, product certification, or co-marketing initiatives. As a result, produce-centric promotions

remain ad-hoc, and many small producers lack clarity on how to formally participate in the city's branded campaigns. This disconnect leaves significant brand equity untapped, hampering consistency in messaging and diluting the overall impact of *Kota Rempah* across the souvenir landscape.

Perceived Value of Gastronomy Souvenirs

Across interviews, gastronomy souvenirs were celebrated as a tangible, low-risk way for visitors to take home Ternate's heritage—in contrast to more expensive handicrafts or less portable cultural experiences. Respondents highlighted Ternate's strategic role as North Maluku's primary port of entry and the growing number of international cruise ship calls, emphasizing that edible souvenirs can serve as practical, memorable “first” or “last” impressions for tourists (Suhartanto et al., 2018). Products such as *kenari*-based cakes and handcrafted nutmeg syrups were repeatedly praised for balancing nostalgia with novelty, appealing both to returning visitors and curious newcomers. The stakeholders noted the potential environmental benefit of adopting lightweight or biodegradable packaging, although current practices vary widely and would benefit from standardization to fully align gastronomic souvenirs with sustainable tourism principles.

Operational and Market Barriers

Despite this value proposition, producers face steep cost pressures. Some raw materials, especially specialty ingredients like high-grade coffee or custom labelling supplies, must be procured from distant suppliers in other provinces, driving up per-unit costs and retail prices. Limited access to modern packaging machinery and design expertise further constrains product shelf life and visual appeal on crowded retail shelves. Distribution networks remain predominantly informal—via roadside stalls, local markets, or consignment deals with a handful of convenience-store chains—making it difficult for many MSMEs to achieve reliable order volumes or to penetrate larger regional markets. Without a coordinated marketing strategy or dedicated tourism storefronts beyond the Tara No Ate outlet, producers struggle to sustain consistent sales, especially during off-peak tourism seasons.

Policy Recommendations from Stakeholders

To address these challenges, informants converged on two priority actions. First, the *Dinas Pariwisata* advocates for a partnership with *Dinas Perindustrian dan Perdagangan* to establish a small-scale packaging facility in Ternate—equipped with filling, sealing, and graphic-design services—to lower input costs and improve product consistency. Second, there is strong support for an inter-departmental *Kota Rempah* task force that unites tourism promotion, creative-economy development, and MSME capacity-building under a shared strategic framework. Such collaboration could standardize quality control, co-brand culinary souvenirs alongside official city logos, and integrate product launch events into the city's festival calendar. Stakeholders believe these measures would enhance market access, reduce barriers to formalization, and solidify Ternate's reputation as the preeminent “City of Spices.”

DISCUSSION

The Strategic Role of Gastronomic Souvenirs in Place Branding

The rich diversity of Ternate's spice-based foods and snacks naturally reinforces the “*Kota Rempah*” (Spice City) brand. By packaging local spices and traditional recipes as authentic

products, Ternate leverages its heritage as a historic spice trading hub. Gastronomic souvenirs carry strong place meanings: they are “goods charged with meanings linked to the geographic and touristic space” that generate sensory and emotional connections for visitors (Horodyski et al., 2014; Levyda et al., 2021). In effect, purchasing Ternate’s signature spice products or snacks allows tourists to extend their travel experience – literally taking home a piece of the local culture. As Horodyski et al. (2014) note, food and beverages as souvenirs give recipients “a part of the lived experience,” becoming what the authors term “gastronomic souvenirs”. Therefore, when visitors enjoy Ternate’s clove- or nutmeg-infused candies, syrups, or crackers, they are connecting emotionally to the island’s identity (Şahin-Yılmaz & Yılmaz, 2025). In short, local culinary items serve as cultural carriers (Park et al., 2023; Tham & Chin, 2024), transmitting Ternate’s spice heritage and creating memorable associations that reinforce its *Kota Rempah* image.

The tourism literature highlights how local cuisine is a core element of destination identity. Food is “inextricably linked to tourism” as both a learning medium and a key part of the visitor experience (Jiang et al., 2023; Tham & Chin, 2024; Yulius et al., 2024). In Yangzhou (China), researchers found that local cuisine helps “create destination uniqueness” and directly influences travel satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2023). Analogously, Ternate’s distinctive spice products, embedded in island lore and history, uniquely mark the city. When packaged attractively, these products not only represent authentic taste but also embody cultural identity (Dong, 2018; Swasty & Mustafa, 2023). Kladou & Trihas (2021) further argue that integrating gastronomy into place branding helps smaller or rural destinations “polish their own distinctive identity” and differentiate themselves in competitive tourism markets. In sum, by marketing its endemic spices and recipes, Ternate harnesses gastronomic branding to strengthen visitors’ emotional bonds and solidify its image as the celebrated “*Kota Rempah*”.

Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism

The development of Ternate’s culinary MSMEs can drive inclusive and sustainable tourism growth (Purnomo & Purwandari, 2025). Many thriving food enterprises in Ternate were led by local entrepreneurs (notably women) who preserve traditional recipes. This mirrors findings in the literature that women entrepreneurs often serve as “key stakeholders” in rural tourism, embedding cultural elements (such as local food products) into the tourism economy (Stylianou et al., 2025). By opening food stalls, small eateries, or home-based food & beverage workshops, female business owners help diversify the tourism offer and ensure that economic benefits reach the community (Rodríguez-Vera et al., 2025; Sosa et al., 2021). Research shows that women’s participation in tourism delivers “inclusive and diversified services” and positions them as contributors to a resilient tourism sector (Kimbu et al., 2019; Stylianou et al., 2025). Empowering women-led MSMEs in Ternate – for example by providing training or microfinance – would therefore advance broader goals of local empowerment and gender-inclusive development.

Promoting Ternate’s gastronomic products also encourages tourists to stay longer and engage more deeply with the culture. Culinary tourism is well known to increase visitor satisfaction and loyalty (S. Yang et al., 2024). For instance, studies in Indonesia found that exposure to local food experiences led to higher tourist satisfaction and a greater intention to revisit (Fitrizal et al., 2021; Prayoga et al., 2023; Roslina et al., 2023; Yulius et al., 2024). When travelers sample Ternate’s cuisine on-site or participate in cooking demonstrations, they not only enrich their experience but become ambassadors for the destination (Recuero-Virto &

Arróspide, 2024). Such product-based tourism tends to extend length of stay: tourists often build their itineraries around markets, food trails, and cooking classes, which lengthen visits compared to sightseeing alone (Wondirad et al., 2021). Deeper cultural engagement – like learning the story of nutmeg farming or the history of spice route – creates emotional memories that foster repeat visitation (Lu et al., 2022). By actively integrating culinary experiences into Ternate's tourism offerings, local stakeholders can thus capture these long tail benefits.

In addition, developing strong local food clusters can distribute tourism spending (Duglio et al., 2022). Supporting home-grown brands and facilitating links to urban markets can create sustainable value chains. The OECD has stressed the importance of “strengthen[ing] local tourism value chains” and helping small tourism firms integrate into wider markets (OECD, 2024). In practice, this could mean connecting Ternate's spice producers to national retailers or online platforms, so that a visitor's purchase continues to support the destination long after departure (Seaman & Schroeder, 2022; Yuan et al., 2022). Such inclusive supply-chain development is consistent with sustainable tourism frameworks, ensuring that growth is broadly shared among Ternate's communities.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite these opportunities, several challenges emerged in the Ternate context. Stakeholders pointed to branding inconsistencies and uneven product visibility as obstacles. For example, without a unified quality label or narrative, the *Kota Rempah* brand risks dilution: some products carry the spice theme well, while others lack clear branding (Santos & Giraldi, 2017). The literature warns that fragmented branding can weaken destination identity (and confuse tourists), suggesting a need for coordinated marketing and certification (Bartoli et al., 2022; Chiang & Chen, 2023; Li et al., 2025; Singh & Bhatt, 2024). In this case, many producers lack formal quality certification, making it harder to assure buyers of authenticity and safety. This gap echoes broader findings that formal labeling and standards (e.g. geographic indications or halal certification) can significantly enhance consumer trust in food souvenirs.

Another issue is market exposure. Many MSMEs operate locally or sell informally, so their products reach few outside markets. Limited marketing channels and distribution networks constrain growth. If Ternate's halal-friendly spice snacks remain unknown beyond local kiosks, the *Kota Rempah* concept loses impact. Tourism research emphasizes that effective souvenir marketing requires not only an appealing product but also awareness-building (through shops, tourism centres, e-commerce, etc.) (Duan et al., 2023; Lv et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2022). Therefore, policy measures should focus on connecting producers to tourist routes—such as through partnerships with tour operators or museums—and on offering training in branding and retail.

Geographically, tourism infrastructure and culinary enterprises are clustered unevenly around the main island, and even more in the islands of Hiri, Batang Dua, and Moti (Marasabessy, 2016; Nurlaili et al., 2017). This spatial inequality mirrors patterns seen in many destinations, where tourism benefits agglomerate in core areas while outlying regions lag (Krabokoukis & Polyzos, 2021). Unlocking the potential of these peripheries will be key for inclusive development. The literature on rural and creative tourism suggests that peripheral areas often hold untapped cultural resources (Borowiecki et al., 2024; Fonseca & Ramos, 2012; Harfst et al., 2024). In Ternate's case, opportunities exist to empower villages with spice gardens, agro-

tourism routes, or cultural homestays. More intensive stakeholder engagement and infrastructure investment in these areas could rebalance the benefits (Oliver et al., 2024; Z. Yang et al., 2025). Addressing these challenges – by ensuring consistent branding, quality assurance, and broader geographic participation – will be critical to realize the full promise of gastronomy-based tourism.

Implications for Policy and Development

The above insights point to concrete policy directions. First, the local government and tourism agencies should support product innovation and professionalization of food souvenirs. This includes assisting MSMEs with improved packaging design, labelling, and product development. As Horodyski et al. (2014) underline, packaging is one of the five key attributes of successful gastronomic souvenirs. Attractive, informative packaging (and perhaps eco-friendly materials) can communicate Ternate's spice heritage more effectively to visitors and retail markets (Steenis et al., 2017). Training programs or design grants could help small producers upgrade their visual identity to match the *Kota Rempah* theme.

Second, local government should foster market linkages. Aligning with OECD (2024) recommendations, Ternate can develop capacity-building initiatives to help MSMEs “integrate and compete in the global tourism system”. For example, digital marketing workshops could teach producers to export via online platforms; partnerships with regional distributors could open new sales channels. Similarly, improving transportation and cold-chain logistics could allow more perishable food souvenirs (like sauces or fresh condiments) to reach tourists. Promoting tourism cooperatives or village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) could also reinvest tourism earnings locally and provide transparent revenue-sharing (Ultari & Khoirunurrofik, 2024).

Crucially, these efforts must also align with broader sustainable development goals. Ternate's spice branding initiative resonates with the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy framework, which calls on cities to embed local food heritage into sustainable urban development (Park et al., 2023; Pearson & Pearson, 2017; Zhu & Yasami, 2021). As UNESCO recently noted in discussions about Zanzibar and Stone Town, cities using culture and creativity can “strengthen their cultural identity [and] boost sustainable tourism” (UNESCO, 2024). By seeking Creative City designation or similar partnerships, Ternate can gain technical support and publicity for its gastronomic-focused strategies. This would complement national efforts to achieve the SDGs, especially goals on sustainable tourism, poverty reduction, and cultural preservation.

Finally, stakeholder co-creation should be institutionalized in tourism planning (Ćwikła et al., 2025). Engaging local chefs, spice growers, and community leaders in branding decisions ensures that initiatives remain authentic and inclusive. Theoretical work emphasizes that place branding benefits when multiple actors co-create a “holistic and inclusive place brand experience” (Kladou & Trihas, 2021). In practice, this might involve a multi-stakeholder *Kota Rempah* council that standardizes certifications, plans gastronomy events, and monitors equity across districts. In sum, by combining MSME support, innovative marketing, and alignment with UNESCO/sustainability frameworks, Ternate can transform its rich culinary heritage into a driver of equitable and sustainable tourism development (Lin et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

By examining Ternate's network of culinary MSMEs and their 48 unique products, this research highlights the significant potential of gastronomic souvenirs to contribute to the city's *Kota Rempah* branding and to support more sustainable, community-focused tourism. The diverse use of local spices, nuts, and seafood underscores how these edible products embody city branding and extend visitor engagement through sensory experiences. At the same time, the prominence of home-based and women-led enterprises points to an inclusive economic dynamic, even as challenges—such as inconsistent branding, supply-chain constraints, and uneven geographic distribution—limit full realization of these benefits.

To build on this foundation, local stakeholders should pursue integrated measures that strengthen product development, quality assurance, and market channels under a cohesive *Kota Rempah* framework. Practical steps include establishing shared packaging and design facilities, formalizing branding guidelines, and expanding training and distribution to peripheral districts like *Pulau Ternate*, *Moti*, and *Batang Dua*. These efforts can help stabilize costs, improve product consistency, and ensure tourism benefits reach a broader community. Looking forward, future research could explore the feasibility and impact of Geographic Indication (GI) status for key Ternate products—such as nutmeg blends or *kenari* confections—to safeguard authenticity, enhance legal protection, and differentiate the city's offerings in wider markets. Comparative studies of GI implementation in other spice-producing regions or UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy would further inform best practices for governance, community involvement, and socio-economic outcomes. By combining targeted policy support with continued scholarly inquiry into GI and place-based branding, Ternate and similar destinations can progress toward more resilient, culturally grounded, and inclusive tourism development.

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