

Distinctive Culinary Characteristics of Ayam Betutu in Denpasar: Implications for Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development

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Abstract

Ayam Betutu has been recognized both locally and internationally as a traditional dish from Bali. Despite its frequent appearance on restaurant menus and its popularity among travellers, limited scientific attention has been given to its adaptations and the influence of these adaptations on consumer behaviour, economic sustainability, and cultural preservation. Ayam Betutu dishes served in Denpasar, Bali, were examined. Participatory observation, in-depth interviews with culinary stakeholders, and document reviews were used as the primary data collection methods. Based on the findings, two dominant variants of Ayam Betutu were identified in Denpasar, namely Ayam Betutu Gilimanuk (Men Tempeh), characterized by extreme spiciness resulting from prolonged cooking, and Ayam Betutu Liku, and distinguished by an initial grilling of coconut fibers followed by slow cooking. A significant increase in product consumption was achieved through the marketed version of Ayam Betutu Liku, enabling the company to attain approximately 120 million in daily sales. The findings indicated that variations in preparation methods directly influenced consumer appeal, promoting economic success and supporting the preservation of Balinese culinary traditions. Furthermore, the study was designed to serve as a foundation for future research across Bali aimed at strengthening a culinary identity rooted in traditional gastronomic frameworks that contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Ayam Betutu, Consumer Preferences, Culinary Tourism, Denpasar, Economic Sustainability.

Introduction

Tourism development and local economic growth in Bali have long been supported by traditional Balinese cuisine, which has been regarded as an invaluable form of cultural heritage and a key driver of the island's culinary potential. Visitors to Bali have been drawn not only to its natural beauty and cultural diversity but also to its authentic gastronomic traditions, through which distinctive culinary experiences reflecting local identity are actively sought. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of Balinese traditional cuisine at both local and international levels are considered essential to maintaining cultural heritage and sustaining the tourism economy (1). Bali's culinary heritage has been recognized as an inseparable dimension of its cultural identity, being deeply connected with religious rituals, social traditions, and tourism-related activities. Traditional Balinese cuisine has been utilized not only for daily sustenance but also as a medium of cultural expression, hospitality, and the embodiment of

communal values (2). Among the various dishes representing Balinese gastronomy, Ayam Betutu has been given a particularly important position. The dish, prepared through marinating and slow-cooking chicken in a complex mixture of traditional spices known as *basa genep*, has been celebrated for its aromatic flavor and ritual importance. In recent decades, as Bali has evolved into a major international tourism hub, traditional dishes such as Ayam Betutu have been used as cultural symbols to enhance the island's image and stimulate economic activity through culinary tourism (3). Food has been integrated into the tourist experience, creating connections between cultural authenticity, local livelihoods, and identity preservation (4). The rapid expansion of Bali's tourism industry has transformed local food systems, creating both opportunities and challenges for cultural heritage conservation (5). Findings from earlier research indicated that culinary products play a major role in influencing

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tourist satisfaction and destination branding (6). The growing demand for authentic experiences has encouraged local entrepreneurs to adapt traditional dishes in response to tourists' preferences for taste, presentation, and hygiene (7). While such adaptations enhance commercial appeal, they may also result in the dilution of cultural authenticity and the gradual disappearance of traditional cooking techniques (8). As stated in previous studies, the expansion of tourism-related food markets in Bali has caused tension between the maintenance of cultural integrity and the pursuit of economic competitiveness (9). This situation has emphasized the need to document and analyze how traditional foods evolve under external influences (10).

Various aspects of Balinese gastronomy have been investigated in past research, including its significance in tourism promotion, gastrodiplomacy, and destination development (11). It has been stated in earlier studies that traditional food functions as an important asset for cultural heritage preservation and the advancement of rural tourism (12). Further investigations have revealed that local food markets play a crucial role in driving sustainable tourism by linking culinary products with community livelihoods (13). It was also found that Balinese cuisine serves as a medium for gastrodiplomacy, contributing to the promotion of Indonesia's cultural identity at the international level (14). Nevertheless, most of these studies have approached Balinese cuisine in general terms, without examining the regional variations and preparation differences found in specific dishes such as Ayam Betutu (15). Additionally, few empirical analyses have explored how variations in ingredients, cooking techniques, and food presentation affect consumer preferences and the economic sustainability of culinary enterprises. Prior research has also tended to emphasize the symbolic meaning of cuisine while giving limited attention to its practical and market dimensions, particularly in urban contexts such as Denpasar, where tourism and local commerce are highly integrated (16).

This absence of dish-specific and location-specific analysis indicates a clear research gap. Although Ayam Betutu has been recognized as an emblem of Balinese culinary identity, limited scholarly

understanding exists regarding how its distinctive preparation methods contribute simultaneously to cultural continuity and tourism-based economic growth (17). In particular, systematic documentation of regional variations, production processes, and market outcomes has been rarely undertaken in existing studies. Addressing this gap is considered crucial for developing evidence-based strategies that integrate heritage food preservation with sustainable tourism initiatives. Accordingly, the present research was directed toward examining Ayam Betutu as a representation of culinary uniqueness within Denpasar Municipality, which functions as the political and economic center of Bali. Denpasar has been selected as a strategic research site due to its diverse culinary landscape, dense tourist activity, and unique position as a convergence point between traditional and modern influences (18). Ethnographic methods, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews with producers, and document analysis, were applied to identify distinctive preparation techniques and regional variants of Ayam Betutu available in Denpasar. Furthermore, the analysis has been extended to evaluate how differences in ingredients, spices, cooking methods, and presentation affect consumer preferences and contribute to market performance. The broader socio-economic implications of these culinary practices were also analyzed, emphasizing their role in fostering sustainable livelihoods and strengthening Balinese cultural identity through gastronomy-driven tourism.

The overarching objective of this research was defined as the enhancement of academic understanding of how traditional culinary features function as both economic drivers and instruments of cultural heritage preservation (19).

The novelty of this research lies in its ethnographic documentation and comparative analysis of Ayam Betutu variants within a single urban context, combining perspectives from culinary anthropology and tourism economics (20). Unlike previous studies that regarded Balinese cuisine as a uniform cultural entity, this work demonstrates how subtle differences in cooking practices—such as grilling with coconut fibers or slow simmering in spice paste—generate distinct consumer experiences and economic outcomes. By linking these culinary distinctions to larger issues of

sustainability and cultural management, the study provides original empirical evidence contributing to the growing body of literature on gastronomic tourism in Indonesia. Ultimately, the findings highlight that preserving culinary diversity is not only a matter of taste or tradition but also a strategic component of inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Methodology

Research Design

An ethnographic qualitative design was employed for the examination of the culinary characteristics and preparation processes of Ayam Betutu, one of Bali's most iconic traditional dishes. The design followed frameworks outlined in earlier research on culinary ethnography (21). Ethnography enabled a deep understanding of the dish's preparation and cultural meaning through direct participation and observation in natural settings, ensuring cultural and contextual accuracy.

Participants and Sampling

Participants consisted of culinary practitioners and experienced producers of Ayam Betutu operating in Denpasar Municipality, Bali. Individuals with verified experience in Ayam Betutu production were selected using a purposive sampling technique (22). Eligibility required a minimum of five years of continuous involvement in preparation or business management. To broaden perspectives, a snowball sampling approach was applied, allowing new participants to be identified through referrals from initial informants. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, defined as the point when no new themes emerged.

Data Collection Technique

Multiple qualitative methods were applied to enhance reliability and analytical depth. Key preparation activities such as spice blending, marinating, and slow cooking were observed directly during participant observation to document authentic culinary practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with business owners and key staff to examine ingredients, preparation techniques, cultural significance, and consumer preferences. Documentation analysis was carried out through the review of culinary texts, traditional recipes, and restaurant menus featuring Ayam Betutu (23). Methodological triangulation was employed to

integrate these data sources—observations, interviews, and documents—ensuring cross-validation and overall data credibility (24).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed three stages: reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. During reduction, transcripts, field notes, and documents were coded and categorized into themes related to ingredients, preparation, cultural practices, and consumer appeal. In the display stage, thematic relationships were presented in matrices and tables to clarify patterns. Conclusions were drawn through iterative analysis, peer discussion, and repeated verification against raw data to ensure accuracy and credibility.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as emphasized in prior methodological studies. Credibility was achieved through field engagement, triangulated methods, and peer review. Transferability was supported by rich contextual descriptions. Dependability was maintained through detailed documentation and audit trails of analytic decisions. Confirmability was ensured through transparent reporting of the analytical process. This interdisciplinary approach aligns with recognized standards in qualitative culinary research and strengthens the scholarly reliability of the findings.

Results

Denpasar, the capital of Bali Province, serves as the main center for governance, commerce, and tourism. The city's name, meaning *North of the Market*, reflects its historical roots as a trading hub once known as *Peken Payuk* and now *Kumbasari Market*. Tourism remains a key economic driver, with culinary tourism contributing substantially. Among the most prominent dishes, Ayam Betutu attracts both local residents and international visitors.

Ayam Betutu Culinary Establishments

Three main Ayam Betutu establishments in Denpasar were identified through field observation: Gilimanuk, Liku, and Pak Man (Table 1). These businesses vary in location, operating hours, and production capacity. Despite shorter hours, Ayam Betutu Liku recorded the highest daily sales, reflecting its strong market position.

Table 1: Comparison of Ayam Betutu Establishments in Denpasar

Establishment	Location(s)	Operating Hours	Price Range (IDR)	Employees	Daily Sales (portions)
Ayam Betutu Gilimanuk	Jl. Bulu Indah 51X, Jl. Merdeka 88, Jl. Raya Tuban 2X	9:00 AM- 10:00 PM	80,000	35	300-500
Ayam Betutu Liku	Jl. Gandapura III F Kesiman, Tohpati, Kuta	8:00 AM- 3:00 PM	15,000- 80,000	60	500-1,500
Ayam Betutu Pak Man	Jl. Kubu Anyar 72X, Kuta	8:00 AM- 10:30 PM	80,000	20	200-400

Table 2: Ingredient Comparison

Ingredients	Gilimanuk & Pak Man	Liku
Main Ingredient	Young local chicken	Broiler chicken
Key Spices	Shallots, garlic, galangal, ginger, turmeric, coriander, candlenuts, shrimp paste, pepper, brown sugar, lemongrass	Shallots, Balinese garlic, green cayenne pepper, galangal, turmeric, ginger, sand ginger, <i>Wangenan</i> , shrimp paste
Preparation Technique	Boiling (<i>mengungkep</i>)	Grilling with coconut fiber followed by boiling

Strong consumer demand and profitability were demonstrated by Ayam Betutu Liku despite its limited operational time.

Ingredients and Spices Used

Ingredient profiles differed slightly across the three establishments shown in Table 2. Gilimanuk and Pak Man used a similar spice blend, whereas Liku incorporated distinctive local spices that produced a unique aroma and flavor. These variations in spice composition and cooking techniques were found to influence the sensory quality and consumer perception of the dish.

Processing Techniques

Taste and texture were clearly influenced by cooking methods. Gilimanuk's version used prolonged boiling, resulting in deep spice absorption and a tender texture. In contrast, Liku's method involved grilling over coconut fiber before boiling, creating a smoky aroma that enhanced consumer appeal. This hybrid process generated greater sensory satisfaction among consumers.

Presentation and Accompaniments

Presentation also influenced consumer preference. Gilimanuk served Ayam Betutu in traditional bamboo baskets (*bese*), while Liku and Pak Man complemented the dish with fried peanuts, *plecing* vegetables, *sambal bawang matah*, and *pindang* eggs, creating a more visually appealing and flavorful presentation. The use of traditional packaging and vibrant side dishes strengthened the dish's cultural and aesthetic value.

Customer Preferences and Sales Analysis

A strong consumer preference for Ayam Betutu Liku was indicated by sales data. Despite shorter hours, it consistently achieved the highest sales volume due to its grilling technique and competitive pricing. As shown in Figure 1, average daily sales for Liku were about 1,000 portions, compared to 400 for Gilimanuk and 300 for Pak Man. Market performance was shown to be driven by preparation methods and product differentiation.

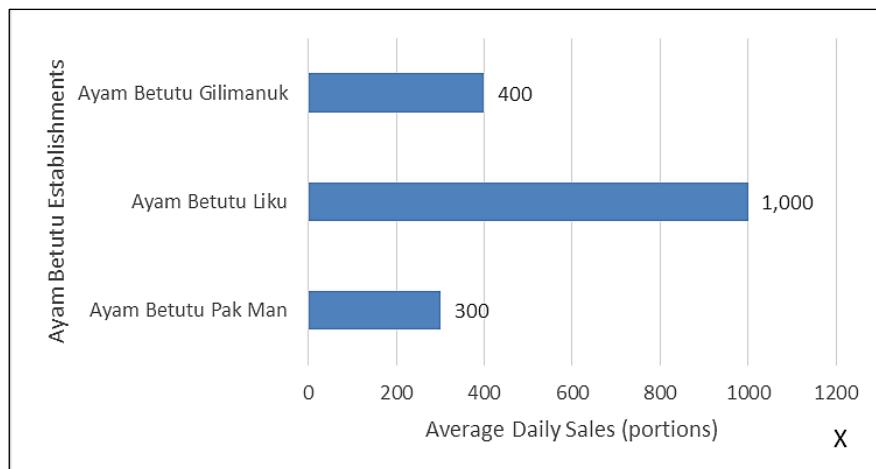


Figure 1: Average Daily Sales Comparison among Ayam Betutu Establishments

Hypothesis Testing

An independent samples *t*-test examined differences in consumer preferences between boiled and grilled-plus-boiled preparations. Based on 30 daily observations per establishment, the test yielded $t = 3.45$, $df = 28$, $p < 0.01$, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The result confirmed a significantly higher consumer

preference for the grilled-and-boiled technique used by Ayam Betutu Liku.

Economic Impact and Tourism

Ayam Betutu establishments contributed significantly to Denpasar's local economy through employment generation and culinary tourism. As shown in Table 3, Liku provided the highest employment and income levels, indicating stronger market demand and business growth.

Table 3: Economic Impact of Ayam Betutu Establishments

Establishment	Employment Provided	Average Monthly Income (IDR)	Tourism Impact
Ayam Betutu Gilimanuk	Moderate	120,000,000	High
Ayam Betutu Liku	High	200,000,000	Very High
Ayam Betutu Pak Man	Low	90,000,000	Moderate

Overall, the findings demonstrated that differences in preparation, ingredients, and presentation significantly influenced consumer preferences, sales performance, and economic outcomes. These variations underscored the pivotal role of Ayam Betutu in sustaining Denpasar's culinary identity and promoting tourism-driven economic growth (25).

Discussion

Summary and Reformulation of the Conclusions

The distinctive culinary characteristics of Ayam Betutu in Denpasar were analyzed to determine their contribution to preserving Bali's culinary heritage and supporting local economic sustainability. Two main variants were identified: Ayam Betutu Gilimanuk, prepared with a dry spice blend and prolonged cooking that enhances flavor and tenderness (26), and Ayam Betutu Liku, grilled

over coconut fibers before slow cooking (27). These techniques represent more than regional preferences; they embody cultural expressions deeply rooted in Balinese tradition and produce notable socio-economic effects.

Sales data for Ayam Betutu Liku, ranging from IDR 40 million to 120 million per day, confirmed that consumer preferences and market performance were strongly influenced by specific preparation methods and ingredient combinations (28). These results align with earlier research showing that distinctive culinary experiences attract tourists and encourage repeat visits. The second hypothesis that Ayam Betutu's distinctiveness promotes both economic sustainability and cultural preservation was also supported. The strong brand identity developed by producers was found to enhance business resilience and safeguard traditional cooking practices, consistent with findings from previous studies indicating that

traditional cuisines reinforce cultural identity and stimulate tourism growth.

Theoretical Justifications and Comparisons

The findings support theories suggesting that culinary uniqueness plays an essential role in sustainable gastronomic tourism. Traditional methods, such as grilling over coconut fibers, were shown to appeal to tourists who seek authentic culinary experiences, reinforcing broader concepts of authenticity in tourism (29). Similar patterns have been reported in other global cuisines, including Mediterranean and Japanese food traditions, where authentic preparation enhances destination branding and increases visitor satisfaction, demonstrating the wider relevance of these results (27, 30).

The importance of preserving local spice blends and cooking techniques is also reflected in previous research, which highlights the need to protect traditional cuisine from the homogenizing effects of globalization (12). These preparation methods serve not only practical culinary purposes but also function as expressions of cultural identity. The strong consumer engagement observed in this study further emphasizes the practical and economic value of safeguarding traditional culinary practices in contemporary tourism markets (25).

Practical, Cultural, and Economic Consequences

The distinctive characteristics of Ayam Betutu were found to create strategic opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Within Bali's competitive gastronomic landscape, specialization in traditional dishes enables the development of niche markets, increases consumer demand, and enhances profit margins. Emphasis on authentic preparation techniques was shown to improve competitiveness while preserving cultural integrity.

The coconut-fiber grilling and slow-cooking techniques documented in this study were observed to represent both culinary craftsmanship and cultural preservation frameworks, helping counter the standardization risks often associated with mass tourism. Economically, the commercial success of Ayam Betutu Liku demonstrated how distinctive local cuisine can complement tourism marketing and elevate Denpasar's global appeal. These results reflect broader international trends

where culinary distinctiveness such as Thai street food or regional Italian gastronomy has been leveraged to attract visitors and stimulate local economies.

Limitations and Future Studies

The study's geographic focus on Denpasar limits the generalization of findings to other regions of Bali or Indonesia. Broader studies should be conducted across multiple areas to capture wider variations in culinary practices, consumer preferences, and cultural impacts. The exclusive use of qualitative methods may also constrain the generalizability of results; integrating quantitative tools such as surveys, sensory analyses, and economic impact assessments would enhance the robustness of future research.

Further exploration of community participation in culinary heritage preservation and visitor perceptions of authenticity is recommended to inform cultural policy development. In response to increasing commercialization, community-based management approaches are encouraged to ensure that culinary heritage remains both economically sustainable and culturally authentic. The distinctive preparation of Ayam Betutu was shown to significantly influence consumer preference, economic performance, and the preservation of Balinese culinary heritage. The integration of gastronomic uniqueness with cultural and economic dimensions demonstrated that traditional cuisine can serve as a driver of sustainable tourism. Strengthened promotion and preservation strategies derived from these findings are expected to enhance Denpasar's culinary identity, support local enterprises, and safeguard Balinese culinary traditions within the dynamics of globalization.

Conclusion

The distinctive culinary characteristics of Ayam Betutu were ethnographically analyzed within Denpasar, focusing on three prominent establishments: Gilimanuk, Pak Man, and Liku. The first two establishments applied a traditional technique known as *Ayam Betutu Men Tempeh*, involving a steaming process that produces a spicy yet delicate flavor deeply infused into the meat. In contrast, Ayam Betutu Liku utilized a unique method of grilling chicken over coconut fibers before slow cooking it in a rich blend of traditional spices, creating a complex, smoky flavor that

appeals strongly to consumers. This distinctive preparation was found to contribute to Liku's market success, resulting in daily sales between IDR 40 million and 120 million.

These findings confirmed that culinary distinctiveness plays a crucial role in attracting customers, generating economic value, and supporting sustainable tourism based on local food heritage. The identified preparation techniques were shown to enhance consumer appeal while promoting the preservation and transmission of Balinese cultural traditions, consistent with earlier research emphasizing the importance of traditional cuisine in cultural sustainability.

The scope of this study was limited to Denpasar due to time and resource constraints. Further research is recommended to be extended to other regions of Bali to capture variations in culinary practices, consumer preferences, and their socio-economic implications. The inclusion of quantitative methods such as consumer surveys and economic analyses has been recommended to strengthen future findings.

Overall, the results demonstrated that the distinctive qualities of Ayam Betutu significantly contribute to Bali's economic development, enrich its culinary tourism, and preserve the island's cultural heritage.

Abbreviations

IDR: Indonesian Rupiah, H0: Null Hypothesis, H1: Alternative Hypothesis, SEM: Scanning Electron Microscope.

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Author Contributions

Ni Made Suriani: study conception, design, methodology, investigation, data analysis, writing original draft, reviewing article, I Wayan Santyasa: supervision, validation, writing review, editing, reviewing article, Komang Sudarma: data collection, resources, formal analysis, reviewing article, Made Tegeh: visualization, project

administration, writing review, editing, reviewing article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation or writing of this manuscript.

Ethics Approval

This research involved interviews and observations with adult participants and adhered to the ethical standards of Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha (UNDIKSHA), Bali, Indonesia. Ethical approval was obtained from the UNDIKSHA Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 038/UN48.24.1.1/LT/2023, issued on 11 July 2023), and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of all personal information was strictly maintained throughout the study.

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