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Stone, Matthew J and Sthapit, Erose  (2024) Memories are not all positive: conceptualizing negative memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 54. 101296 ISSN 2211-9736

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2024.101296>

**Publisher:** Elsevier

**Version:** Published Version

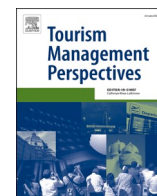
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# Memories are not all positive: Conceptualizing negative memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Memorable tourism experience  
Memorable food tourism experience  
Food tourism  
Culinary tourism  
Memory

## ABSTRACT

Memorable tourism experience (MTE) and memorable food tourism experience (MFTE) research has focused almost exclusively on positive experiences. This has limited theoretical development because categorizing positive experiences may not cover all memorable experiences. This study asked travelers for their most memorable negative food travel experience. Notably, about 30% stated they never had a negative MFTE. Factors contributing to a negative MFTE were: food/drink quality; sanitation/food safety; cultural differences; dietary/menu restrictions; service attributes; price/perceived value; and destination's lack of food or restaurant availability. These factors differ from positive MFTE. Negative MFTE focused more on food and service than other attributes (e.g. social, touristic) found with positive MFTE. Some factors (e.g. food, service) contribute to both positive and negative MFTE, while others (e.g. sanitation) only to negative MFTE. Thus, Herzberg's two-factor theory can be applied to MFTE: attributes may be satisfiers (leading to positive MTE), dissatisfiers (leading to negative MTE), or either.

## 1. Introduction

In the past several years, tourism researchers have extended their research beyond the aspects of a tourism experience itself and into the realm of memory. Memorable food tourism experiences are important because tourists who receive such experiences are considered more likely to revisit a destination (Shoukat, Selem, Elgammal, Ramkissoon, & Amponsah, 2023). These memorable experiences are also linked to place attachment (Soonsan & Somkai, 2023), destination loyalty (Di-Clemente, Hernández-Mogollón, & Campón-Cerro, 2019; Souki, Oliveira, Guerreiro, Mendes, & Moura, 2022), subjective well-being (happiness and life satisfaction) (Rodrigues, Borges, & Vieira, 2023). Food experiences play an essential role in framing a tourist's decision-making (Mariani & Okumus, 2022). Food consumption is central to the tourism experience and often presents a distinctive destination product (Okumus, Mehraliyev, Ma, & Mehraliyev, 2021), contributing to destinations' appeal and competitiveness (Antón, Camarero, Laguna, & Buhalis, 2019). Food experiences attract tourists and create strategic opportunities for destinations (Carvalho, Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Souza, 2023; Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

According to the World Food Travel Association (Stone, Migacz, &

Garibaldi, 2020), 53% of tourists who travel for leisure purposes are also motivated by food/drink, and about 25% of the tourists' expenditure is on food. Food experiences during traveling get engrained in the memories as food carries a more significant impact on memory than other destination attributes (Stone, Migacz, & Wolf, 2019). Both food and drink experiences are included in "memorable food tourism experiences", which follows Wolf (2014), who included both food and drink experiences under the umbrella of food tourism. While some have provided distinction between food tourism, culinary tourism, and gastronomic tourism, the terms are often used interchangeably (Everett, 2016; Stone, 2022) as they are within this article.

Memorable local food tourism experiences are multidimensional (Badu-Baiden, 2021), and many researchers have investigated what attributes of a food or drink experience make it most memorable (e.g., Sthapit, 2017; Stone, Soulard, Migacz, & Wolf, 2018; Williams, Yuan, & Williams Jr, 2019). For example, it may be the food, the service, the setting, the dining companions, or elements of novelty that make an experience memorable for positive reasons (Stone et al., 2018). This is important because aspects of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) can lead to revisit intention (Stone et al., 2018; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018).

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2024.101296>

Received 26 February 2024; Received in revised form 16 August 2024; Accepted 18 August 2024

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However, all memorable food and drink experiences are not positive. Kim, Wang, and Song (2021) identified that food was one of the top five destination attributes resulting in negative tourism experiences. Exotic foods may be perceived as disgusting. Travelers sometimes get food poisoning. Travelers have told researchers about their negative experiences, but they have been omitted in most descriptions of MTE attributes. For example, Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) and Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2010) removed negative feelings from their research into elements of MTE. Likewise, within culinary tourism, Stone et al. (2018), mentioned that negative experiences may lead to memorable food tourism experiences (MFTE), but negative elements were not analyzed in detail.

It is important to understand negative memorable experiences because memory researchers believe that both positive and negative memories can have similar impacts (Jorgenson et al., 2019). In a non-tourism study, Kensinger and Schacter (2006) found that negative valence leads to the creation of a stronger memory than positive valence does. In another study, Kensinger (2007) found that negative emotions boosted not only the subjective vividness of a memory but also the likelihood that event details are remembered.

In the context of tourism, travelers can have negative experiences during their stay at a destination despite the best efforts of the service providers (Kim et al., 2021; Sthapit, Björk, & Jiménez Barreto, 2021). Pine and Gilmore (1998) provide supporting claims by stating that a poor service easily converts into an experience, creating a memorable encounter of a negative kind. The impact of such negative experiences may be greater than that of positive experiences (Kim & Chen, 2019), leading to undesirable behaviors, such as negative word-of-mouth, switching and complaints (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011). Recent studies have thus argued that negative experiences are a critical component of memorable experiences (Sthapit, Björk, & Jiménez Barreto, 2021). Further, there may be different components leading to positive or negative memories. In a study of tourism destination attractiveness, Mikulić, Kresić, Miličević, Šerić, and Ćurković (2016) found that the same factors that contribute to a positive experience are not necessarily those that lead to a negative experience. Gastronomy was a hybrid, taking on attributes of satisfier and dissatisfier, in their research.

Theoretical development has been limited by a near-universal focus on positive elements. Do the same factors make both positive or negative experiences memorable? Or is there a different set of factors that applied to memorable negative experiences? For example, celebrating a special occasion was a reason that an experience would be memorable (Stone et al., 2018). However, it seems less likely that a celebration would be a reason that a special occasion was a negative memorable experience. On the other hand, there may be elements that contribute more to negative than positive experiences. Thus, this research seeks to provide a more holistic view of MTEs—by studying the flip side of the joy of travel: the disappointing, disgusting, irritating, and other negative experiences. This study contributes to theoretical research on MTEs, and it also has practical impact by advising destinations and food tourism providers about potential pitfalls that lead to long-term traveler dissatisfaction.

## 1.1. Literature review

### 1.1.1. Attributes of memorable food tourism experiences

Theoretical development on memorable food tourism experiences (MFTE) is based on research into MTEs. The works of Tung and Ritchie (2011), Kim (Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2021), and Chandralal (Chandralal, Rindfleisch, & Valenzuela, 2015; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015) sought attributes of a tourism experience or destination leading it to be memorable (see Stone et al., 2018, for a summary of these research findings). Research on MTE was expanded into food and drink tourism (culinary tourism). Researchers (e.g., Badu-Baiden, 2021; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018) found that many of the attributes leading to MFTE were different from those leading to MTE.

While there is not a concrete agreement on what leads to MFTE, MFTE include aspects of: the destination and its culture; the food; the service; the environment; the individual; social interaction; and other attributes like novelty and authenticity. These are summarized in Table 1. Sthapit (2017) identified multiple attributes of MFTEs: local specialties and food attributes (taste), authenticity, novelty, togetherness and social interaction, hospitality, and servicescape including food souvenirs. Stone et al. (2018) found that what food/drink was experienced was just one element. Other elements included: where it

**Table 1**

Memorable food tourism experiences: previous frameworks.

Sthapit (2017)	Components of tourists' memorable food experiences	Authenticity, novelty, togetherness, and social interaction; hospitality; servicescape; food souvenirs; local specialties and food attributes (taste)
Stone et al. (2018)	Elements of memorable food/drink experiences	Food/drink (what food or drink was experienced); location/setting (where did the food or drink experience occur); companions (who participated in the experience); occasion (when did the experience occur); touristic elements (e.g., novelty, surprise) (why was this experience memorable)
Williams et al. (2019)	Themes contributing to memorable gastro-tourism experiences	Travel status (deliberate or incidental); travel stages (when the most memorable experiences occur); foodie risk-taking; independent co-created tourist-host relationships; authenticity; sociability; and emotions
Sthapit, Kumaran, and Björk (2020)	A conceptual framework for positive memorable local food experiences	taste, socializing with friends and family members, novelty, authenticity, ambience, affordable price, and local interactions
Kodas and Aksoy (2022)	Components of tourist memorable local food experiences	Novelty, togetherness, and local interactions; hospitality and services; taste and food attributes; ambience and setting; local culture
Badu-Baiden (2021)	Elements that constitute tourists' memorable local food tourism experience	relaxation and energizing, hospitable service experience, ambience and aesthetics, learning exotic food culture, sensory appeal and authentic experience, hedonic experience, conviviality, and gastronomic novelty and curiosity.
Sthapit, Björk, Coudounaris, and Jiménez-Barreto (2022)	Dimensions of memorable Halal food experience	Hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge.
Sthapit, Björk, and Piramanayagam (2023)	Memorable dimensions associated with non-Muslim tourist's recent halal food experiences	Taste, spending time with family and friends, novelty, quality and safety, hospitality, ambience (setting/servicescape) and experiencing others' culture through food.
Sthapit, Björk, Piramanayagam, and Coudounaris (2023c)	Underlying antecedents of memorable halal food of non-Muslim tourists	Novelty seeking, authenticity, experience co-creation, substantive staging of the servicescape, togetherness and sensory appeal

happened, with whom, and when. Other touristic elements (e.g., novelty, authenticity, and desire to return) were also included in MFTE. Themes contributing to memorable gastro-tourists' experiences were listed by Williams et al. (2019): deliberate and incidental gastro-tourists, travel stages, foodie risk-taking, interdependent co-created tourist–host relationships, authenticity, sociability, and emotions.

Sthapit, Coudounaris, and Björk (2019) extended the MTE concept with the inclusion of experience co-creation, the servicescape and experience intensification as variables affecting tourists' MFTEs. Sthapit, Björk, and Kumaran (2021) proposed that memories of local food experiences can be categorized into three themes: food (taste, novelty, and authenticity), people (interacting with family members, friends, and locals), and the setting (ambience/servicescape). Recently, Kodas and Aksoy (2022) analyzed online reviews to categorize MFTE, although posting of an online review does not necessarily relate to memorability.

### 1.1.2. Memorable tourism experiences: overwhelmingly focused on the positive

Consumer behavior research in tourism and hospitality has primarily focused on positive emotions (Kim et al., 2021; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Within MTE research, Sthapit et al. (2017, 2021, b) acknowledged that the term memorable tends to have a positive connotation. Badu-Baiden (2021) noted that MFTE researchers have acknowledged memorable local food tourism experience as an experience “subjectively evaluated as pleasant when it is remembered” (p. 4). Yet, this definition is not wholly accurate. Not all memorable experiences are positive, as people remember both positive and negative (Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2010). Stone et al. (2018) asked travelers to recall their most memorable food experience while traveling. A vast majority were positive, but many travelers recalled negative experiences because consumption experiences can result in positive or negative emotions (Oliveira, Souki, Silva, Rezende, & Batinga, 2023).

Despite this, researchers conceptualizing MTE have focused almost exclusively on positive experiences. Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) derived experiential themes of MTE, removing negative concepts from their analysis. Similarly, Kim et al. (2010) also focused on positively remembered experiences. When measuring MTE, Ng et al. (2022) included only positive items (e.g., “I really enjoyed this tourism experience”), resulting in a scale that may not measure all memorable experiences. While Kim et al. (2010), identified “adverse feelings (e.g., anger and frustration)” as a potential construct of MTE, they removed this before settling on a final scale (measuring positive, rather than all, MTE).

This uncovers a gap in the literature and a theoretical understanding of both MTE and MFTE: researchers have not yet explained how memories may be created without a positive experience. Both negative and positive experiences can influence MTE (Barbieri, Henderson, & Santos, 2014; Kim, 2014; Sthapit, Björk, Jiménez-Barreto, & Stone, 2020; Stone et al., 2018). Jung, Yoon, and Song (2021) proposed that it is necessary to include separate items in the surveys to measure positive and negative emotions. Investigating adverse feelings and negative memories as a component of MTE is essential for a complete understanding (Kim, 2014; Sthapit et al., 2021, b).

Theoretical understanding of MTE may intersect with other theories. However, there is not one dominant theory which has been used for theoretical development in memorable tourism experiences. For example, Sthapit (2019) used broaden and build theory to explore visitors' memorable local food experience in Rovaniemi, Finland and suggested that the positive emotions of joy and interest were most salient, while participants seldom experienced negative emotions during their local food. In another study, Sthapit et al. (2022) used memory-dominant logic as the theoretical foundation to link the seven components of memorable tourism experience, memorable halal tourism experience, and place attachment. Other theories include cognitive appraisal theory (Kim & Hwang, 2022; Sthapit, Björk, Piramanayagam, & Coudounaris, 2023a) and stimulus-organism-response theory

(Sthapit, Yang, Ji, Björk, & Stone, 2024). For example, Sthapit, Björk, Piramanayagam, and Coudounaris (2023a) used cognitive appraisal theory as the theoretical foundation to link the antecedents of memorable halal food experience (novelty, authenticity, experience cocreation, substantive staging of the servicescape, togetherness and sensory appeal) and place attachment. In addition, Kim and Hwang (2022) used cognitive appraisal theory to investigate the destination attributes determining negative emotions and consequent future behavioral intentions. Drawing on stimulus-organism-response theory Sthapit et al. (2024) tested a new model for memorable halal food experiences, finding four antecedents and two outcome variables.

### 1.1.3. Comparing positive and negative tourism experiences

When asked to freely recall an MTE (Kim et al., 2010) or MFTE (Stone et al., 2018), a vast majority of memories were positive. Sthapit, Kumaran, and Björk (2020); Sthapit, Björk, and Kumaran (2021) asked about positive and negative emotions during a local food experience. Eight respondents mentioned anger or fear, while over 150 mentioned positive emotions.

Kim et al. (2010) concluded that individuals recall positive experiences more easily than negative ones, although this thesis was not directly tested. Tung and Ritchie (2011) said that negative memorable experiences were seldom recalled. However, their study did not specifically ask participants to recall a negative experience. Indeed, several participants mentioned negative emotions like fear, anger, and frustration. Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, and Diener (2003) found that even though travelers recalled substantially more positive emotions experienced during their trip than negative ones, they recalled both types of emotions. Torres, Milman, and Park (2018) studied theme park reviews on Trip Advisor. Negative visitor reviews were longer. However, more delighted experiences were shared, compared to outraged experiences. This follows the research on MTE, where respondents have focused on positive memories.

Earlier research in other subjects provides some additional context. In a study not directly focused on tourism, Bohanek, Fivush, and Walker (2005) asked 54 participants to recall two negative and two positive experiences. Eight memories related to travel, of which seven were positive. When comparing positive and negative memories of a sporting event, Kensinger and Schacter (2006) found that memories with both positive and negative valence were recalled in equal detail. However, negative memories were less distorted over time, suggesting that the accuracy of negative memories may be greater than positive ones. Yet, both positive and negative valence memories were recalled more than a neutral control group.

In general, past research suggests that travelers prefer to share positive tourism memories more than negative ones. There is also evidence that travelers have more positive experiences than negative ones. However, there is not clear evidence that positive experiences are more memorable, and MTE researchers have rarely considered differences (if any) between positive and negative experiences.

### 1.1.4. Negative memorable tourism experiences

Only a few studies focused on negative MTEs as more than an incidental component of the research. Kim et al. (2021) used travelogues to identify destination attributes that resulted in negative tourism experiences. They focused on destination attributes, but some of the highest frequency occurrences (e.g., quality of service, price, food, visitor management) may relate to negative MFTE. In an open-ended survey, Sthapit, Björk, and Jiménez Barreto (2021) found that factors leading to negative Airbnb experiences included lack of hospitality standards, poor service recovery, untrained staff, and untrustworthiness. In a casual dining environment, Souki et al. (2022) found that both positive emotions and negative emotions directly and positively impact memorable experiences.

While they did not frame their research as focusing on memorable experiences, Torres et al. (2018) investigated factors leading to

consumer delight (positive) and consumer outrage (negative) in theme park reviews on Trip Advisor. They found that different factors led to delight and outrage, providing evidence that the foundations of positive MTE may differ from negative MTE. Some attributes were a different side of the same coin. For example, positive food and beverage led to delight, while poor quality food and beverage led to outrage. However, many factors were different (poor facility maintenance led to outrage but good facility maintenance did not lead to delight. Similarly, in analyzing reviews of vegan-friendly restaurants, [Oh, Badu-Baiden, Kim, and Lema \(2023\)](#) found that different factors led to delight (e.g., food and menus, social interaction) and frustration (price, poor service, and hygiene issues). We note that the concepts of delight and frustration relate to, but are not analogous to, positive and negative MFTE.

A full analysis of guest satisfaction research is outside the scope of this review, but other tourism research may help to frame negative MFTE. Destination service quality (DSQ) factors have been found to significantly impact MTE ([Ng et al., 2022](#)). In addition to destination service quality (e.g., [Kodas & Aksoy, 2022](#)), studies on determinants of food image (e.g., [Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000](#)), destination attributes (e.g., [Kim et al., 2021](#)), and restaurants ([Oh et al., 2023](#)) also advise this study.

While it is impossible to list all the potential factors that may lead to negative MFTE, [Table 2](#) summarizes many concepts that may relate to negative MFTEs. [Badu-Baiden \(2021\)](#) divided the food tourism experience into five dimensions: food (type, quality, food category, authenticity, novelty), social, place (destination), service place, and time. [Sthapit, Björk, and Kumaran \(2021\)](#) listed three similar categories of influences on tourists' memories of local food experiences: food, people, and the setting (ambiance/servicescape). [Table 2](#) categorizes possible attributes that may contribute to negative food tourism experiences and placed them into the three factors from [Sthapit, Björk, and Kumaran \(2021\)](#) and the time dimension from [Badu-Baiden \(2021\)](#).

## 2. Methods

This study was conducted using a sample of American leisure travelers. A survey was distributed to qualified respondents through an international survey research company from June 30 to July 17, 2023. Respondents recorded their own answers and submitted the survey using Qualtrics. The survey included both open-ended and closed-ended (quantitative) questions about general food and drink tourism attitudes, behaviors, and reflections. The sample consisted of adult Americans (18 years or older) who had taken a leisure trip overnight and at least 50 miles (80 km) from home in the past two years. The survey company balanced the sample by gender and generation of the respondents.

This study is grounded in the memory-work principle of qualitative research ([Haug, 1987](#)). Beginning in feminist studies ([Onyx & Small, 2001](#)), it was adapted to tourism studies ([Small, 1999; Stone et al., 2018](#)). In memory-work, individuals share feelings and experiences without interference of the interviewer ([Lupton, 1994](#)). Broad questions are recommended to get a diverse range of memories.

This study considers respondents' open-ended responses to a question on memorable food tourism experiences, which was adapted from [Stone et al. \(2018\)](#) who asked respondents to "Briefly describe your most memorable food/drink/culinary experience while traveling." For this survey, the text of the question was adapted to: "Some food or drink experiences while traveling are bad. Please describe your most memorable negative (bad) food or drink experience while travelling." The justification for the use of open-ended questions in the questionnaire is that such questions do not provide participants with participants with a predetermined set of answer choices, instead allowing the participants to provide responses in their own words ([Allen, 2017](#)).

A total of 514 adult American leisure travelers completed the survey. Responses ( $n = 130$ ) were removed from the data set for many reasons, including unreasonably quick survey completion time and answering a control question improperly. Average survey response time was

**Table 2**  
Possible attributes that may contribute to negative food tourism experiences.

Factor	Category	Based on
Food quality	Food	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Kim et al. (2021); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Stone et al. (2018); Torres et al. (2018)</a>
Value, price	Food	<a href="#">Kim et al. (2010); Kim et al. (2021); Kozak; Torres et al. (2018)</a>
Food authenticity & novelty	Food	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Sthapit, Björk, and Kumaran (2021); Stone et al. (2018)</a>
Knowledge of product and quality; culinary specialties; learning	Food	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Hjalager and Corigliano (2000)</a>
Image problems with cuisine	Food	<a href="#">Hjalager and Corigliano (2000)</a>
Novelty / neophobia	Food	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Quan and Wang (2004); Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Stone et al. (2018)</a>
Special diets (e.g., vegan; Halal)	Food	<a href="#">Oh et al. (2023); Sthapit et al. (2022)</a>
Food contamination/health, hygiene, cleanliness, safety in general	Food; Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Hjalager and Corigliano (2000); Kim et al. (2021)</a>
Local culture	Food; Social	<a href="#">Kim (2014)</a>
Eating company/social interaction	Social	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013); Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015); Hansen et al. (2005); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Stone et al. (2018)</a>
Language	Social	<a href="#">Kodas and Aksoy (2022)</a>
Service quality (staffing, training, interaction, hospitality, friendliness)	Setting (Place); Social	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Dwyer and Kim (2003); Hansen et al. (2005); Kim et al. (2010); Kim (2014); Kim et al. (2021); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Sthapit, Björk, and Piramanayagam (2023); Stone et al. (2018); Torres et al. (2018)</a>
Accessibility	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Kim (2014)</a>
Regulations and customs	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Dwyer and Kim (2003); Kim et al. (2021)</a>
Unethical business practices; poor management; anger; frustration	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Kim et al. (2010); Kim (2014); Kim et al. (2021); Tung and Ritchie (2011)</a>
Visitor management, crowding, demand	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Kim et al. (2021); Torres et al. (2018)</a>
Environment; maintenance upkeep; design; atmosphere; facilities	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Badu-Baiden (2021); Hansen et al. (2005); Kim et al. (2021); Kodas and Aksoy (2022); Torres et al. (2018)</a>
Weather	Setting (Place)	<a href="#">Kim et al. (2021)</a>
Unexpected happenings	Time	<a href="#">Kim et al. (2010)</a>
Special occasion	Time	<a href="#">Stone et al. (2018)</a>

approximately eight minutes. As this was an online survey without researcher intervention, not every survey respondent completed the open-ended questions completely, such as providing responses unrelated to the question. After removing unqualified responses, 40 additional responses were removed for not answering this open-ended question clearly or properly. This included those who listed only positive experiences (thus, negative MFTE could not be analyzed), didn't recall, or provided an unclear response. This left 344 valid responses which were analyzed for this article. While this decreased the sample size, it ensured that the analysis was only conducted on valid responses. [Table 3](#) includes the demographics of respondents. Initial data analysis and statistics were completed in IBM SPSS. Responses were exported into Microsoft Excel for coding.

Following [Stone et al. \(2018\)](#), a review of literature was used to identify potential factors (and general categories) of attributes contributing to negative MFTE (See [Table 2](#)). This was provided as a guideline

**Table 3**  
Demographics of sample.

Gender	Female	54.4%
	Male	43.9%
	Other / Prefer not to Answer	1.8%
Generation	Baby Boomer/Silent (born pre-1946)	26.2%
	Generation X (born 1965–80)	32.0%
	Generation Y (born 1981–1996)	20.1%
	Generation Z (born after 1996)	21.2%
	Prefer not to Answer	0.6%
Education	College Graduate	73.0%
Family Status	Have Children Under 18 at home	36.6%
Household Income (USD)	< \$50,000	17.4%
	\$50,000–\$99,999	32.3%
	\$100,000–\$149,999	24.4%
	\$150,000+	22.1%
	Prefer not to Answer	3.8%

n = 344.

for categorization of data. The first author placed the responses into a spreadsheet, read each response, and categorized the responses into categories. Separately, the second author reviewed the responses and categories. Some categories were re-titled to be clearer and more inclusive, and an additional category was added. These modifications were confirmed by the first author in conversation with the second author. Then, a third researcher reviewed the spreadsheet to ensure both that the categories were logical (face validity) and that the responses were categorized correctly. The data was found to be coded into attributes, but changes were recommended when combining the sub-categories into larger categories. Discussion among the authors resulted in the final factors. It should be noted that the factors discovered only partially fit into the categories identified in the literature review, which is addressed in the discussion.

In the quotes herein, spelling errors were corrected, but grammar was left intact. If a respondent mentioned multiple items, it would be categorized into each category. For example, a negative MFTE regarding food quality and service quality would be counted in both categories.

### 3. Results

Respondents identified their most memorable negative (bad) food or drink experience while traveling. This section presents the major categories of elements leading to a negative memorable food or beverage tourism experience which resulted from the data analysis, including a category of individuals who stated they never had a negative/bad food

**Table 4**  
Factors contributing to a negative memorable food tourism experience.

Contributing factor	Subcategories
Food or drink quality	General poor taste or poor food quality
	Spoiled or expired food
	Food temperature and preparation (too cold, too hot, overcooked, undercooked, raw)
	Excessive food seasoning and flavoring
	Lack of flavor or bland
	Poor drink quality or drink attributes
Sanitation and food safety	Food poisoning or illness (vomit, diarrhea, stomach pain)
	Facility cleanliness and sanitation
Cultural differences	Bizarre, foreign, or unusual food (neophobia)
	Unrecognized food
Dietary/menu restrictions	Vegetarian/vegan
	Allergy
Service attributes	Poor service / long wait time
	Incorrect order
	Dining environment
Price / perceived value	Value for price paid
	Inadequate portion size
Lack of food or restaurant availability	

or drink experience (Table 4).

Almost 30% (n = 101) wrote that they either had not had a bad food or drink experience while traveling or that they could not recall a bad food experience while traveling. These included responses such as: “I have never had a bad food experience while traveling” and “can’t think of any.” This is especially significant because they were asked to list their most memorable negative food tourism experiences, rather than suggesting that they may not have had a memorable negative food tourism experience in the question.

#### 3.1. Food or drink quality

As food and drink are the only components common to all food travel experiences, it is not surprising that poor quality or bad tasting food and drink led to negative MFTE. Over one-third of travelers (n = 118) mentioned poor taste or quality of food and drink. Most (n = 111) mentioned the food taste or quality. Distaste for foods was categorized as general poor taste or quality, or with specific attributes, including poor taste, spoiled foods, or poor preparation. The negative memories recounted relate to individual perceptions (rather than objective evaluations) of foods. Because of individual or cultural differences, some foods found to be of poor taste or quality by one traveler may actually be perceived to be of acceptable quality by other travelers. Foodborne illness was categorized under sanitation unless food quality was explicitly listed.

##### 3.1.1. General poor taste or poor food quality

Many respondents (n = 63) pointed out bad tasting food in general:

“Most negative experience would have been one of our visits to Mexico. We went into town to experience, local cuisine, and culture. My husband and I ordered tacos and burritos and the meat was very tough and gamy.”

(68, Female)

“When in England I was disappointed with the mushy peas and soggy chips I had.”

(54, Male)

“I was in St Petersburg, Russia, and went to a restaurant specializing in local cuisine, like stews and casseroles. I ordered something that sounded interesting from the waiter’s description, but his English was bad and my Russian non-existent. So not their fault but the meat was unidentifiable and full of gristle and bits of bone. Completely inedible.”

(69, Female)

“I went to a food truck event & tried a bbq burger & it was the most disgusting food I’ve ever consumed in my life of enjoying burgers because I love burgers.”

(24, Male)

Poor quality food included the food at a destination in general

“When I went to Tahiti, I felt the food was gross and gamey.”

(54, Female)

##### 3.1.2. Spoiled or expired food

Several (n = 8) mentioned food that they felt was spoiled or expired. For example:

“My most memorable negative food experience while travelling was in China. I ordered a dish at a restaurant that just tasted terribly off, like it contained spoiled meat or old vegetables. It was so bad that I had to send it back to the kitchen, and even the owner looked at me with sympathy for having to endure the awful taste.”

(41, Male)

“A chef whose food I returned fixed me a plate of old spoiled food and stood at restaurant entrance to see if I ate it.”

(66, Female)

“The cheese was expired in the flight from Boston to Dubai.”

(26, Male)

### 3.1.3. Food temperature and preparation (too cold, too hot, overcooked, undercooked, raw)

Travelers ( $n = 29$ ) also noted improperly cooked foods. This includes food that was overcooked, as well as undercooked or raw foods, which usually referred to meats like chicken.

“Raw chicken at a restaurant was horrible I bite into my chicken sandwich, and it was bloody.”

(29, Female)

“I went to this in and out in Atlanta the fries were soggy and cold ... none of it was fresh.”

(23, Female)

“Food cold and tasted so bad we returned it.”

(47, Female)

“Uncooked food and very warm alcohol.”

(44, Male)

### 3.1.4. Excessive food seasoning and flavoring

Some travelers ( $n = 8$ ) referred to excessive food seasoning and flavoring. Rather than bad taste in general, they referred to specific taste attributes, including too spicy, salty, sour, or bitter.

“The food that was offered on a city food tour was not to my liking. Most items were not a variety but all very spicy.”

(70, Female)

“The streets were chaotic and crowded, the food was too spicy for my taste, Ironically, one of the worst experience I had while traveling.”

(38, Male)

### 3.1.5. Lack of flavor or bland

On the opposite end of the spectrum, six travelers found food to be bland, tasteless, or lacking flavor.

“It was in the Czech Republic. Someone ordered for me to save time. The meal was a fried piece of chicken with no flavoring, greasy fries and bread with no butter.”

(70, Female)

“I recall having ordered a dish that looked appetizing, only to discover that the chicken tasted bland and was not well-cooked in the middle. I had to return the food - something I do not feel good doing.”

(70, Female)

### 3.1.6. Poor drink quality or drink attributes

18 respondents mentioned drink quality, with only three of these also mentioning food quality.

“When in Puerto Rico we did a Rum tasting tour. It was so hot and the rum was too warm to enjoy.”

(43, Female)

“I tested bubble tea at a local restaurant which was bitter.”

(43, Male)

“I drank a traditional drink and threw up.”

(23, Female)

## 3.2. Sanitation and food safety

Many respondents ( $n = 49$ ) said that sickness, cleanliness, or sanitation issues caused their most memorable negative FTE.

### 3.2.1. Food poisoning or illness

Related to bad food and sanitation, many individuals ( $n = 39$ ) mentioned sickness or food poisoning. These included food poisoning in general and specific symptoms of foodborne illness (e.g., diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain.) Only two responses were categorized as both bad-tasting and as food poisoning. It was not assumed that the food was bad tasting in order to make someone ill.

“Bad experience was after having some Chinese rice and I started running stomachache.”

(23, Male)

“My last trip to Mexico I got Montezuma’s revenge that was the only negative impact food had on me the water got to me through the food and I got really sick.”

(41, Male)

For many, the impact extended beyond the dining experience, affecting their entire trip, or causing them to lose vacation days to illness.

“One time I got sick from eating at a dive restaurant in Memphis. I got food poisoning and was miserable the entire trip.”

(37, Female)

“I ate some bad seafood ended up being sick the whole trip.”

(38, Male)

“I ate food at a sushi place that gave me food poisoning for a couple of days.”

(23, Female)

### 3.2.2. Facility cleanliness and sanitation

Facility sanitation issues ( $n = 10$ ) included general restaurant cleanliness, including bugs and vermin.

“It was when I went to this one place and it was dirty and had a bug in the food.”

(23, Female)

Being served food with hair in it ( $n = 3$ ) was included within cleanliness instead of with bad food, because it was the sanitation issue that caused the experience to be labeled as negative.

“There was a long blonde hair in my gyro in Greece and it was a horrendous experience.”

(24, Female)

## 3.3. Cultural differences

Encountering unusual foods can be a rewarding part of a travel experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). However, many foods were perceived as too culturally different, strange or unusual, leading to a negative MFTE among eight individuals.

### 3.3.1. Bizarre, foreign, or unusual food (neophobia)

Some of these responses could potentially be considered to be food neophobia.

“I had a hard time in Nicaragua. I was doing some volunteer literacy work in a very rural area and I was honestly quite happy with the basic everyday food: black beans, tortillas, platanos, and for some reason instant grits imported (or probably donated) from the USA, eggs twice a week as a special treat. What did me in was my birthday,

when as a very, VERY special treat we had cuy (guinea pig). I'm pescatarian. But on the bright side, everyone else seemed to like it!" (56, Female)

"I would say just trying a new food and not liking it at all." (63, Female)

### 3.3.2. Unrecognized food

When experiencing other cultures, a few did not recognize the foods which were offered or eaten:

"At breakfast buffet in the hotel where I picked bacon however its dried fish." (46, Other)

"They didn't have anything I recognized on the menu." (50, Female)

### 3.4. Dietary/menu restrictions

Travelers ( $n = 9$ ) mentioned not finding suitable food for special diets or food requirements, especially vegan/vegetarian food, and allergies. Although these may be tangentially related to poor food, poor service, or wrong food served, they are very specific.

#### 3.4.1. Vegetarian/vegan

Vegetarians/vegans ( $n = 4$ ) had negative memories when not given suitable options to eat, or food was mislabeled.

"I am a vegetarian and they told me an item on the menu was "vegetarian" even though it contained fish." (51, Female)

"Trying to get vegan food on a cruise ship. Was served yogurt, cheese, and other non-vegan items even though servers were told and explained what 'vegan' means." (67, Male)

#### 3.4.2. Allergy

Related to special food requirements, food allergies led to negative MFTE among some respondents ( $n = 5$ ), and this sometimes resulted in illness.

"When I had gone to a restaurant in the state I was visiting I have a seafood allergy and they had cooked the meat with the same pan as they cooked the shrimp and it was so awful." (19, Female)

### 3.5. Service attributes

Service attributes led to negative MFTE in 48 respondents.

#### 3.5.1. Poor service/long wait time

Many respondents' ( $n = 35$ ) most negative MFTE included poor service or excessive wait times, either waiting for a table or for food.

"I had reservations for a restaurant. The service was bad. We had to wait for 15 minutes to be acknowledged and then over an hour for our meal to arrive." (79, Male)

"Extremely poor service, one persons meal did not arrive until everyone else had eaten and all appetizers were served after the main course." (74, Male)

#### 3.5.2. Incorrect order

A second category of poor service was receiving the wrong food or having an order messed up ( $n = 8$ ). This also included making an incorrect order.

"Going to a famous and expensive restaurant that got our [order] messed up." (58, Female)

"It wasn't the food I ordered I got, it was another recipe of food entirely. I felt irritated immediately." (40, Male)

#### 3.5.3. Dining environment

The dining environment, such as being crowded or having poor seating was the most negative MFTE for only five respondents. For example:

"The streets were chaotic and crowded, the food was too spicy for my taste, Ironically, one of the worst experience I had while traveling." (38, Male)

### 3.6. Price/perceived value

Travelers' perception of food being too expensive or not worth the price paid led to a negative MFTE in twenty travelers. Typically, price itself was not enough to be cause a negative MFTE. Most respondents ( $n = 11$ ) mentioned something other than just price (e.g., poor food quality or portion size") in their reasoning.

#### 3.6.1. Value for price paid

"It was an expensive winery tour that didn't provide much product and the people weren't kind." (43, Male)

"We just got back from NYC where we made the mistake of not asking the particular vendor about prices. He charged us \$35 for two hot dogs and two corn dogs." (45, Male)

#### 3.6.2. Inadequate portion size

Five respondents mentioned that small portion size led to a negative MFTE. This is categorized with value for money rather than quality of food.

"When I went on [a cruise] on day five we had dinner is it wasn't I said best food I ever tasted plus they didn't give you a great amount of food, so you were still hungry after dinner." (19, Female)

"I found this place on google maps and wanted to try it out. I went and ordered the food just for it to be a smaller portion than expected, so I had to get another quesadilla for extra money for what the portions was worth." (22, Female)

### 3.7. Lack of food or restaurant availability

Lack of available food was mentioned by seven travelers. While it does not actually relate to a food experience, it relates to the attempt at a food consumption experience. This could be considered as a destination attribute. For example, "One diner was closed that we had eaten at before and we had to find a different one farther away" (F, 79). Additionally, "I do not like when restaurants are closed due to the fact that they don't have any employees" (M, 48).



### 3.8. Uncategorized responses

Among those who listed an experience, about 6% ( $n = 22$ ) of responses referred to a specific food or specific experience without any context, so they were not categorizable. Because the respondents answered the question, they were included in the analysis. However, they provided insufficient context or narrative to categorize into themes. For example, one individual wrote “the airport food” (22, Male) but did not mention what made the experience negative. Thus, it could not be categorized (e.g. bad food, bad service, price). Other uncategorizable responses included those mentioning a specific food (e.g., “don’t like whole fish”) without an experiential context (e.g. the fish could have been described incorrectly, served incorrectly, or there may not have been an option for fileted fish.) Three mentioned a specific experience, such as having a hangover or grocery shopping, without adequate narration of the aspects or environment that led the experience to being negative.

### 3.9. Multiple categories in a response

Less than 15% of respondents ( $n = 50$ ) expressed a negative MFTE which contained multiple elements. Following Stone et al. (2018), these were counted in more than one category.

“One time I went to this expensive restaurant thinking that the food was going to be good but found out the food was terrible, and the price was 500 dollars.”

(38, Male) – (bad food and high price)

“Ok so I remember when I went to this one restaurant in Houston, TX I don’t remember the name but the service was just bad and the food even worse I’m not sure what the hype was about the restaurant but definitely wouldn’t recommend the potato salad I had was so bad I promise it wasn’t potato salad it was something else just so bad.”

(22, Female) – (bad food and bad service)

“We went to restaurant & waited 1.5 hours to be seated then 30 mins to order plus 15 mins to get our water/sodas & the food was wrong & so we had to wait longer & our waitress rarely came to check on us.”

(23, Female) – (wrong food and poor service)

Only 3% of respondents ( $n = 8$ ) wrote about an experience with three or more negative elements listed. Examples include:

“Once I chose a small restaurant that friends told me about. It should be very good food and very affordable, but it ended up being expensive, food was cold and the service was very slow. We were all very disappointed and left hungry and with less money in our pockets.”

(59, Female) – (poor food, cold food, slow service, high price)

“At JFK Airport getting overcharged for marginal food which was already overpriced, and served by a surly waiter (who apparently didn’t connect that a good tip requires good service!”

(72, Male) – (poor food, high price, poor service)

“It wasn’t that bad, just really overpriced and the food wasn’t that good, the portions were small too.”

(18, Female) – (poor food, high price, portion size)

## 4. Discussion

When asked about an MFTE in general, respondents have overwhelmingly mentioned positive MFTE (e.g., Badu-Baiden, Kim, Xiao, & Kim, 2022; Sthapit, 2017; Sthapit, Björk, et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018). This is supported by anecdotal data as well as general online reviews, which skew positive. This is also logical because if a majority of experiences were negative, it would be hard for a business to survive.

However, this study concludes that a great majority of travelers recall negative food and drink experiences also, and theoretical advancement in understanding memorable tourism experiences has been hampered because of a lack of research on what contributes to a negative MTE. It is not as simple as applying the findings on positive MFTE to negative MFTE. The elements leading to negative MFTE were not the same as elements leading to positive MFTE. Most classifications of MFTE in the literature have included only positive MFTE. This study finds that these classifications only capture a portion of what makes an experience memorable. Even researchers who have mentioned negative MFTE (e.g., Sthapit, Kumaran, & Björk, 2020; Stone et al., 2018) did not include negative items in their final MFTE categorizations.

When asked to recall a negative food or drink experience, it is surprising that a large percentage of travelers explicitly stated that they could not recount a single negative experience while traveling. Without prompting, about one-third of respondents stated they never had a negative MFTE. This suggests that positive food experiences happen more often than negative memorable food experiences. However, data does not indicate if either is more memorable.

Regarding categorization of MFTE, this research indicates that negative memorable food tourism experiences have different components than positive memorable food tourism experiences. Additionally, we conclude that positive MFTE and negative MFTE do not necessarily have opposite attributes (supporting Torres et al., 2018 research on theme park experiences).

For some attributes, the same aspect could result in a positive or a negative memory, depending on the situation. For example, delicious food/drink was memorable and repulsive food/drink was memorable for the opposite reason. However, even in this category, there were different attributes. Spoiled food, for example, led to a negative MFTE. However, non-spoiled food would likely not lead to a positive MFTE.

Considering service, a similar pattern appeared: positive service elements may lead to positive MFTE, and poor service elements may lead to a negative MFTE. However, including the dining environment, it was much more common in positive than negative MFTE. For example, respondents in this study only spoke of a crowded or dirty environment.

While all the aspects that make a negative MFTE fit within attributes provided by previous researchers (Sthapit, Björk, et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018), there are many elements that seem to apply only to positive MFTE. Many of the elements of an MFTE uncovered by previous researchers do not apply to the negative MFTE revealed in this study. There is a chance that they still occur rarely, but, even if they do, they would be very uncommon. Social aspects, such as spending time with friends and family, meeting locals, or celebrating led to positive MFTE (e.g., Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014, 2016; Kudas & Aksoy, 2022; Sthapit, Björk, & Kumaran, 2021; Sthapit, Björk, & Piramanayagam, 2023; Sthapit, Björk, Piramanayagam, & Coudounaris, 2023c; Stone et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019). However, no respondent mentioned this in a negative MFTE. Thus, we conclude that (with perhaps rare exception), this factor should be considered to be an aspect of positive MFTE but not negative MFTE. Food souvenirs (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sthapit, 2017) and food variety (Stone et al., 2018) were not mentioned in negative MFTE. Neither were some other time elements (e.g., celebrating a special occasion) or setting elements (e.g., a wonderful view or an outdoor café) found by Stone et al. (2018). Stone et al. (2018) found that nostalgia led to positive MFTE, as travelers either wished to relive an experience or returned to have the experience again. Not surprisingly, this did not occur in negative MFTE. While it seems obvious that there would be no desire to return to a negative experience, it provides support to consider positive and negative MFTE separately.

Likewise, some subcategories of negative MFTE (e.g., spoiled food, vegetarian food availability) are not found in positive MFTE. However, they may be considered subsets of food in general so they fit into previous categorizations that indicate food attributes or food quality lead to memorable tourism experiences (e.g. Badu-Baiden, 2021; Stone et al.,

2018; Torres et al., 2018). These findings can be linked to memory-dominant logic. Memory-dominant logic suggests that value is constructed through the co-creation of memorable experiences during the customer experience journey. According to Harrington, Hammond, Ottenbacher, Chathoth, and Marlowe (2019), memory-dominant logic is defined as service experience delivery that aims to create value through the provision to memorable experiences, in this context, negative MFTE. Memory-dominant logic views the service experience not as an output but as an input of value-creation as customers and service providers work together to co-create service experiences (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015).

Following the findings of Torres et al. (2018) regarding positive and negative theme park experiences, some attributes are analogous to “satisfiers” and lead only to a positive experience (e.g., socialization with family and friends, celebrating a special occasion), while others seem to be analogous to “dissatisfiers” and lead only to a negative experience (e.g., special diets, crowded environment, spoiled food). This applies Herzberg’s two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1964), originally proposed for job satisfaction but since applied to service quality, to MFTE. It also aligns with Kim, Badu-Baiden, Oh, and Kim (2020) findings applying this theory to food tourism. Food taste led to both positive and negative eWOM (electronic word of mouth), authenticity led to positive eWOM only, and value only led to negative eWOM. The studies align in finding that different factors contribute to positive compared to negative outcomes. In this study, the outcome was memorable experience and in the previous study, eWOM. To summarize, the attributes creating a memorable negative MFTE are *not* simply the inverse of attributes which make an MFTE positive.

Some attributes most common to all dining experiences, in particular food and service, can lead to either positive or negative food tourism experiences (similar to satisfier and dissatisfier). Of the factors listed in Table 4, we propose that several can lead to positive or negative MFTE depending on their valence: food or drink quality and service attributes. Several other factors lead to a negative MFTE but do not contribute to a positive MFTE (and can be compared to dissatisfiers): sanitation and food safety, dietary/menu restrictions, high price/poor value, and lack of food or restaurant availability.

Novelty has been found to lead to positive MFTE (Badu-Baiden, 2021; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018). With positive MFTE, novelty may be associated with new and exciting experiences. In this study, travelers did not mention novelty. However, travelers did reflect on new or novel foods as part of negative MFTE—typically new foods which they did not enjoy. Here, novelty may be associated with neophobia, as individuals encountered bizarre, foreign, or unusual foods. It may also relate to foodie risk-taking (Williams et al., 2019). Thus, we propose that cultural elements can lead to positive or negative MFTE depending on whether it is desired novelty or repulsive novelty.

Surprise was found to be an aspect of positive MFTE (Stone et al., 2018). Within this study, surprise was not mentioned by any traveler. Although this study did not find that surprise was a key element of negative MFTE, it could be argued that surprise is still relevant to negative MFTE. Travelers were surprised to receive bad food, spoiled food, bad service, or the wrong food.

#### 4.1. Elements necessary for a negative MFTE

This research agrees with Stone et al. (2018) in that no specific element is required in a negative MFTE and that a single attribute may be enough to create a negative MFTE. For example, the food may be acceptable—but service may be memorably bad. For others, service may be memorably bad—even if other aspects are not remembered.

A great majority (79%) of those who had a negative experience mentioned only one element that created a negative MFTE. Thus, this study does not support the suggestion by Stone et al. (2018) that experiences with more elements are more likely to be memorable. It could be argued that this supports Sthapit, Björk, et al. (2020) research that there

are more positive aspects than negative in MFTE. On the other hand, these findings may simply indicate (not surprisingly) that tourism is filled with more positive than negative experiences.

There is some evidence that negative MFTE are not as richly remembered as positive MFTE. Many negative MFTE were listed with only brief details (such as being served raw chicken), compared with detailed narratives about positive experiences (Stone et al., 2018). Very few mentioned the name of the restaurant. These observations may mean that memories with a negative valence are recalled in less detail, contradicting Kensinger and Schacter (2006). Another possible explanation is that the retelling of an event (in this case, a positive one) leads to a deeper impression on memory (Ergen & Gülgöz, 2023). Regardless, negative experiences are still impactful as individuals may share negative word of mouth or engage in switching behavior (Stauss & Seidel, 2019).

We propose that expectations play a particularly important role in a negative MFTE. A traveler may expect great service or great food from a restaurant, and it could result in either a positive MFTE, negative MFTE, or an experience that is not memorable at all. However, we propose that travelers do not go into experiences expecting a negative MFTE because if expectations were negative, then they likely would not spend time or money on the experience. While this seems obvious, it creates a behavioral and attitudinal distinction between the positive and negative MFTE. Thus, we propose that memory research incorporate previous expectations to better understand MTE and MFTE.

## 5. Conclusion

To understand the richness of consumer behavior and to expand on theoretical development in MTE, this study considered core elements of negatively remembered experiences. Research in MFTE (and MTE) has categorized previous data to exclude negative items and has mainly focused on positively remembered experiences. In fact, most classifications of memorable tourism experiences (e.g. Kim et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2022) or food tourism experiences (e.g. Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018) in the literature have focused only on positive MFTE. However, in order to advance theory on what comprises MFTE, negative experiences must also be understood. Many elements said to contribute to memorable tourism experiences were not found to apply to negative tourism experiences, while new factors were identified. Thus, Herzberg’s two-factor theory is an appropriate theory for explaining attributes of memorable food tourism experiences: some attributes (e.g. socialization or celebration) contribute only to positive experiences (akin to “satisfiers”), while others (e.g. special diets, spoiled food) contribute only to negative experiences (akin to “dissatisfiers”). Other factors (e.g. food or service in general) may contribute to positive or negative MFTE.

Overall, the findings show that many travelers also recall negative food and drink experiences after the trip and that the elements leading to negative MFTE differ from those leading to positive MFTE. In addition, this study suggests that existing research describing the attributes of MFTE only capture a portion of what makes an experience memorable. This study identified numerous factors that contribute to negative MFTE, while a single attribute may be enough to create a negative MFTE: food or drink attributes, sanitation and food safety, special diets/food requirements, service attributes, price/too expensive, environment and lack of food or restaurant availability. Future categorizations and theoretical development in MFTE should incorporate positive and negative experiences.

### 5.1. Management implications

In tourism, storytelling has become an essential part of destination branding (Ben Youssef, Leicht, & Marongiu, 2019) and destinations have focused on telling positive stories and creating an environment for positive memories. However, looking at positive experiences is only one way to ensure positive memories. Another is to avoid negative memories

among travelers. It is well known that consumers may change behavior or give negative word of mouth following negative experiences. When it comes to negative memorable experiences, this research indicates that aspects of the experience itself seem to override destination attributes. Tourism operators and food businesses should track negative comments, whether in person or online to ensure that operational or service changes are made to avoid these issues in the future. It is also essential that service recovery plans are effectively managed, so that even a bad experience does not turn into a negative memorable experience. This includes reviewing and responding to negative online reviews. Surveys sent after the visit can assess not only perceptions of service and food quality, but they can also assess memorability, as well as to provide a reminder of a quality experience.

From the destination standpoint, it is important to monitor reviews and feedback from individual businesses and attractions (e.g. restaurants, bars, food tours) to determine if there are any negative trends that may need to be addressed. A negative experience at a single food provider may impact an individual's intent to return and recommend the destination as a whole. Destination managers should address any food or drink business that provides bad quality food or bad experiences to tourists. Just as positive food experiences lead to positive destination image, it is possible that a single bad food experience may negatively impact the image of a destination. While a destination may not have the power to sanction a poor-performing business, there may be ways to provide pressure or incentives to improve. This research also demonstrates that destinations should ensure that there are adequate restaurants and foods serving various populations (e.g. vegetarian or gluten-free diners) as a lack of food was also shown to create a lasting negative memory.

When it comes to illness or food poisoning, the negative impact may be especially pronounced. Monitoring reviews and communicating with providers may also help to find the causes of any foodborne illness that can be shared with health authorities. Likewise, destinations may wish to have contingency plans in place to help mitigate the effects of any foodborne illnesses on both tourists and the destination image.

Finally, this provides a blueprint that can be added to service training at a destination or at a food business. This research provides an outline of what leads to negative memories. Utilizing the negative outcomes can be paired with best practices for avoiding these outcomes—along with lessons on why they are so important. It is obvious that restaurants should monitor their dishes to ensure they are of proper quality as well as monitor online reviews for complaints. Further, restaurants serving unusual cuisine may train their staff to recognize signs that guests do not like the food and provide them with a substitute. Waitstaff could undertake more training to better describe foods to individuals so that what they expect is what is delivered.

## 5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The research delineated in this paper is subject to numerous limitations. First, it was limited by the sample in only one country, so it could be duplicated elsewhere to augment the findings of the present study. Comparative studies different nationalities could yield meaningful insights to add to those gained through the present study. Perceptions of food or service quality may differ between individuals from different cultures, which may affect memory formation. Adopting a wider array of data collection methods could also be used. Second, data were collected during the post-visit stage of the trip, so they relied on participants being able to recall the formation of memories from the past. Future studies could collect data on-site or immediately after a visit to avoid false memory recollection. Third, this study sought to categorize negative MFTE and compare this data with previous studies, which has focused on positive MFTE. However, it asked only about the “most memorable” negative MFTE. These experiences may be outliers, or they may be common. Future research could also include a list of positive and negative attributes to understand frequency of occurrence. Further to

understand memorability, more than a single most memorable food tourism occurrence should be studied. For example, travelers could be asked to recall a time in which they were ill from food on a vacation. How do they recall the experience? This could also be applied to positive MFTE to better understand similarities and differences.

It must also be mentioned that the percentages do not mean that only this percentage of travelers have encountered this negative MFTE. It simply means that this was their most memorable negative MFTE. Therefore, the percentages should be used as a guideline for understanding this phenomenon rather than a percentage of all American travelers. It is also recommended to weigh expectations with memorability. On some occasions, travelers expect a memorable experience (almost always positive), but the element of surprise can make any experience memorable for positive or negative reasons.

## Credit authorship contribution statement

**Matthew J. Stone:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Erose Sthapit:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Investigation, Formal analysis.

## Declaration of competing interest

We declare no conflicts of interest in this work.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a California State University, Chico RSCA grant.

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