

## Analysis of the traditional coffee shops in Quito's historic center with tourism potential for the proposal of a food tourism route

Análisis de las cafeterías tradicionales del centro histórico de Quito con potencial turístico para la propuesta de una ruta turística alimentaria

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyze traditional cafés located in the Historic Center of Quito, considering their importance within the city's cultural, social, and tourism dynamics. A quantitative descriptive methodology is employed to identify key variables and measure concepts related to gastronomic heritage, tourism activity, and the classification of establishments. Data collection was conducted through numerical measurement techniques, statistical analysis, and the review of reliable secondary sources, including official records and academic literature. The results show the evolution of these spaces from their traditional role as social gathering places to a diversified offer that integrates contemporary gastronomic services. Likewise, the coexistence of historic establishments with innovative proposals reflects a dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity. The strategic location of cafés near major tourist attractions enhances the visitor experience and contributes to the consolidation of cultural tourism. As conclusion, traditional cafés represent a key component of Quito's cultural identity while contributing to sustainable tourism development and the competitiveness of the destination.

**Palabras clave:** Heritage, gastronomy, tradition, tourism, culture.

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## RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar las cafeterías tradicionales del Centro Histórico de Quito, considerando su importancia en la dinámica cultural, social y turística de la ciudad. Se emplea una metodología cuantitativa de tipo descriptivo, orientada a identificar variables clave y dimensionar conceptos relacionados con el patrimonio gastronómico, la actividad turística y la clasificación de los establecimientos. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante técnicas de medición numérica, análisis estadístico y revisión de fuentes secundarias confiables, como registros oficiales y literatura académica. Los resultados evidencian la evolución de estos espacios desde su función tradicional como lugares de encuentro social hacia una oferta diversificada que integra servicios gastronómicos contemporáneos. Asimismo, se observa la coexistencia de establecimientos históricos con propuestas innovadoras, lo que refleja una relación dinámica entre tradición y modernidad. La ubicación estratégica de las cafeterías en proximidad a atractivos turísticos fortalece la experiencia del visitante y contribuye a la consolidación del turismo cultural. En conclusión, las cafeterías tradicionales representan un componente clave en la identidad cultural de Quito, al tiempo que contribuyen al desarrollo turístico sostenible y a la competitividad del destino.

**Palabras clave:** Patrimonio, gastronomía, tradición, turismo, cultura.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible and intangible assets inherited from previous generations that hold cultural, historical, and social significance for a community, a nation, or humanity as a whole (UNESCO, 1972).

The capital of Ecuador has been declared a World Cultural Heritage site due to its collection of buildings and architectural monuments of great historical importance, which constitute the heritage of Ecuadorians and a source of pride that strengthens the cultural identity of its citizens.

The Organic Law of Culture of Ecuador identifies intangible cultural heritage as values, knowledge, skills, technologies, ways of doing, thinking, and perceiving the world, and, in general, the manifestations that culturally identify individuals, communes,

communities, peoples, and nationalities that make up the intercultural, plurinational, and multiethnic Ecuadorian State (National Assembly of Ecuador, 2016).

The intangible cultural heritage of the city of Quito is presented to the world as a legacy of unique and authentic customs and traditions through its recipes, flavors, culinary techniques, and ingredients, which reflect ancestral knowledge passed down from generation to generation.

The domains of intangible heritage include oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge. In the case of gastronomy and food heritage, it falls within practices related to nature and the universe.

Cultural tourism refers to a type of tourism that allows travelers to experience and learn about the culture, traditions, and heritage of a place. This type of tourism includes activities such as visits to museums, monuments, festivals, and cultural events, as well as interaction with local communities (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Cultural tourism in the city of Quito offers a unique setting to meet tourists' needs and expectations, providing activities that enable the creation of meaningful experiences through contact with historical buildings and residents. This allows for cultural interaction that enriches tourism packages and enhances the image of Ecuador as a destination.

Tourism cultural activities are experiences designed to promote interaction between visitors and local culture through participation in traditions, customs, and artistic expressions of a community. These activities not only enrich the tourist experience but also foster the preservation of cultural heritage and the sustainable development of host communities. They include visits to historical sites, craft workshops, festivals, and artistic events, contributing to a deeper understanding of the region's cultural identity (UNESCO, 2017).

Among the cultural activities carried out in a city declared a World Heritage site are museum visits, historical tours, cultural festivals, gastronomic tastings, visits to churches and cathedrals, enjoying theater performances and folk dance, visiting artisan markets, exploring historical libraries, and participating in photographic tours. These activities transform an itinerary into an authentic and memorable experience.

According to UNESCO, cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging that an individual or group has toward their culture, traditions, values, and expressions. It is a fundamental aspect of cultural diversity that is reflected in the practices, customs, and ways of life of communities (UNESCO, 2005).

The sense of identity and attachment that the people of Quito have toward their architecture, music, and gastronomy creates an emotional and social bond that fosters unity and encourages the local population to commit to the care and preservation of their ancestral heritage.

Gastronomic heritage refers to foods, recipes, culinary techniques, and traditions related to the production and consumption of food that are representative of a culture or community (UNESCO, 2016).

Food tastings, wine tastings, culinary sensory experiences, participation in gastronomic festivals, culinary workshops, and gastronomic routes allow for learning, human interaction, and experiencing culture through Quito's cuisine.

A gastronomic route, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), refers to an itinerary that connects different destinations and culinary experiences, allowing travelers to explore local gastronomy through tasting traditional dishes and visiting markets, restaurants, and workshops. These routes not only promote the gastronomic culture of a region but also encourage sustainable economic development and responsible tourism by involving local communities in the experience (World Tourism Organization, 2012).

The food tourism route of traditional cafés in Quito's Historic Center represents a proposal that enriches the cultural experience of tourists by connecting them with recipes, cooking techniques, flavors, aromas, ancestral knowledge, traditional culinary methods, and interaction with local residents.

Another important aspect of the food tourism route is the generation of economic resources for Quito families involved in tourism, the diversification of tourism packages and services, and the stimulation of the Ecuadorian economy.

What differentiates the food tourism route of traditional cafés in Quito's Historic Center from other proposals is that it fulfills three key aspects: it is experiential, authentic, and of high quality.

Gastronomic tourism routes help diversify the offer and highlight culinary traditions (Pierard & Durán, 2023).

Enhancing the value of Quito's gastronomic and food heritage allows for the recovery of recipes, techniques, and ancestral knowledge, strengthens identity, positions local gastronomy globally, and projects a positive image of the city.

The Historic Center of Quito was chosen for its representation of tradition and its close relationship with gastronomy and culture. Additionally, the community of the Historic Center largely belongs to the popular sectors of Quito, which have been the focus of attention in this context (Cañizares, 2013).

The popular sectors of Quito demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and solidarity among neighbors and blend indigenous and mestizo traditions and customs, making cultural experiences and interaction with tourists highly enriching.

**Table 1.** *Tourist Attractions in Quito Related to the Gastronomic Establishments Selected in the Traditional Cafés Route of the Historic Center.*

Tourist Attraction	Description
Metropolitan Cathedral Museum	Temple built starting in 1543, with three naves and a roof similar to Mudéjar coffered ceilings, featuring highly significant pictorial and sculptural art.
La Ronda House of Arts	Cultural center located in the traditional La Ronda neighborhood, dedicated to preserving crafts, arts, and traditions of Quito.
Itchimbía Viewpoint and Crystal Palace	Architectural and cultural icon made of steel and glass, located on Itchimbía Hill. Currently used as a cultural center for exhibitions, fairs, and events.
Carondelet Palace Museum	Palace that served as the headquarters of the Royal Audience of Quito in 1627; currently the residence of the President of the Republic.
San Marcos Traditional Neighborhood	Established in 1595 as an indigenous parish, known for its tranquility and artistic, artisanal, musical, and literary environment.
Santo Domingo Church and Convent	17th-century temple with three naves and Mudéjar-style ceiling, featuring important pictorial and sculptural art; includes a convent with two cloisters and gilded woodwork.
Church of the Society of Jesus (La Compañía)	Built between 1605 and 1765, notable for gold-leaf altarpieces and significant Jesuit pictorial and sculptural art.
Sucre House Museum	Residence of Marshal Sucre and the Marchioness of Solanda, displaying oil paintings, weapons, and decorative art.
San Agustín Church and Convent	Important architectural complex built between the 16th and 17th centuries, featuring a baroque church and cloister with valuable colonial artworks.
Mama Cuchara Traditional Neighborhood	Traditional area in Loma Grande that preserves colonial architecture and community life of Quito.
Fray Pedro Gocial Convent Museum (San Francisco)	Monumental complex with three temples and six courtyards, housing an exceptional museum with art from the 16th to the 20th century.
La Merced Church	Built between 1534 and 1589, with the tallest tower in the Historic Center; features a Latin cross layout and artworks from the 18th–20th centuries.

City Museum	Former hospital (1565–1974), converted into a museum in 1998 with historical exhibitions, wax figures, and technological displays.
El Panecillo Viewpoint	Historic and scenic site, formerly called Yavirac; includes a replica of the Virgin of Legarda.
Sucre Theater	Built between 1880 and 1886, inspired by La Scala in Milan; promoted by Marieta de Veintimilla.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The Historic Center of Quito constitutes a valuable legacy of colonial architecture, resulting from the development of the Quito School. For this reason, it is considered one of the best-preserved destinations in Latin America. Among its buildings, approximately 130 monuments and nearly 5,000 properties have been registered by the Municipal Department of Heritage Assets. According to information from the Quito Tourism website, 14 main sites have been identified within the colonial district, representing key tourism resources and attractions in this sector (Pérez Quiñonez, 2023).

The city of Quito, as a tourist destination, features Level IV tourist attractions, air connectivity, and sustainable tourism services that enable the creation of unique and unparalleled experiences for tourists residing in Ecuador and around the world.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Through the application of numerical measurement techniques and statistical analysis, the necessary information was collected to achieve the objectives of the study. The research adopted a quantitative and descriptive approach, with the aim of characterizing the phenomenon under investigation and establishing a rigorous analysis.

To further examine the most significant aspects of traditional cafés in Quito's Historic Center, the analytical-synthetic method was employed to break down and analyze the information in detail, facilitating the achievement of conclusive results. Additionally, a review of secondary (bibliographic) sources was used as a theoretical foundation technique to generate quantitative information that supports a numerical understanding of the topic.

The search, review, and selection of theoretical data were obtained from official sources, such as websites of traditional cafés, applying strict criteria of reliability and validity.

## RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained after the collection and analysis of data related to the study variables are presented and discussed. To facilitate an effective synthesis of the data, data tables have been developed.

**Table 2.** *Temporal Analysis of the Gastronomic Establishments Selected in the Study.*

<b>Time Range</b>	<b>Establishments</b>
<b>1850–1899</b>	San Agustín Ice Cream Shop (1858)
<b>1950–1969</b>	Caribe Ice Cream Shop (1950), Modelo Café (1950), El Madrilón Café (1957), Fabiolita Café (1960)
<b>1970–1989</b>	Pim's Panecillo Restaurant (1981)
<b>1990–2009</b>	Plaza Grande Café (2000), Theatrum (2000), Vista Hermosa Viewpoint Café (2005), Los Geranios Tapas & Wine Café (2009)
<b>2010–2022</b>	Mama Cuchara Hotel (2017), La Bodega de Cantuña Restaurant (2017), La Merced Alejita Restaurant (2020), Artífice Café (2021), Misky Food Experiences Restaurant (2022)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the temporal analysis table of the gastronomic establishments selected for the study, five time ranges were established as follows:

Between 1850 and 1969, four establishments were identified, including the oldest cafés and the San Agustín Ice Cream Shop, considered part of the city's historical heritage. This period reflects the consolidation of gastronomic traditions deeply rooted in local culture. The presence of cafés and ice cream shops indicates a shift in consumption habits and the growth of an urban culture centered around coffee and ice cream, which became spaces for social interaction and gathering in Quito.

Between 1970 and 2009, five establishments emerged, marking an expansion toward tourist-oriented restaurants. This phenomenon suggests a transformation in the gastronomic offer, possibly driven by the increase in tourism in the region and the need to diversify available experiences. The incorporation of modern proposals reflects an evolution aimed at attracting a broader and more demanding audience, interested not only in food but also in cultural and leisure experiences linked to urban heritage.

Between 2010 and 2022, five additional establishments were identified, characterized by boutique hotels and innovative concepts. This contemporary growth reveals a trend toward high-quality gastronomy and unique experiences, influenced by international tourism and the globalization of culinary culture. Concepts such as gastronomic experiences and the integration of viewpoints or heritage spaces into the offer

demonstrate a strategy aimed at positioning Quito as a competitive gastronomic destination, capable of combining tradition with innovation.

**Table 3.** Analysis of the Gastronomic Establishments Selected in the Study in Relation to Tourist Attractions.

No.	Commercial Name	Tourist Attraction
1	Fabiolita Café	Metropolitan Cathedral Museum
2	Los Geranios Tapas & Wine Café	La Ronda House of Arts
3	Vista Hermosa Viewpoint Café	Itchimbía Viewpoint
4	Plaza Grande Café	Carondelet Palace Museum
5	Artífice Café	San Marcos Traditional Neighborhood
6	El Madrilón Café	Santo Domingo Church and Convent
7	Modelo Café (Historic Center)	Church of the Society of Jesus (La Compañía)
8	Caribe Ice Cream Shop	Sucre House Museum
9	San Agustín Ice Cream Shop	San Agustín Church and Convent
10	Mama Cuchara Hotel	Mama Cuchara Traditional Neighborhood
11	La Bodega de Cantuña Restaurant	Fray Pedro Gocial Convent Museum (San Francisco)
12	La Merced Alejita Restaurant	La Merced Church
13	Misky Food Experiences Restaurant	City Museum
14	Pim's Panecillo Restaurant	El Panecillo Viewpoint
15	Theatrum Gastronomic Services	Sucre Theater

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the analysis table of the gastronomic establishments selected in the study in relation to tourist attractions, the following elements are identified:

**Churches and convents:** Several establishments are located near historic temples (San Agustín, Santo Domingo, La Merced, La Compañía). This reinforces the connection between religious tourism and gastronomic consumption.

**Museums and cultural spaces:** Other establishments are associated with museums (Metropolitan Cathedral, Sucre House, City Museum, San Francisco Convent, Sucre Theater). In this context, gastronomy complements the cultural experience.

**Traditional neighborhoods and viewpoints:** Establishments such as Artífice (San Marcos), Mama Cuchara, and Pim's Panecillo take advantage of the appeal of neighborhood life and panoramic views.

**Table 4.** Analysis of the Gastronomic Establishments Selected in the Study in Relation to Their Tourism Activity, Classification, and Category.

No.	Café Establishment	Activity	Classification	Category
1	Fabiolita Café	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
2	Los Geranios Tapas & Wine Café	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
3	Vista Hermosa Viewpoint Café	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	First / 4 forks
4	Plaza Grande Café	Accommodation	Hotel	5 stars
5	Artifice Café	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Café	First / 1 cup
6	El Madrilón Café	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Café	First / 1 cup
7	Modelo Café (Historic Center)	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
8	Caribe Ice Cream Shop	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
9	San Agustín Ice Cream Shop	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
10	Mama Cuchara Hotel	Accommodation	Hotel	5 stars
11	La Bodega de Cantuña Restaurant	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	First / 4 forks
12	La Merced Alejita Restaurant	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
13	Misky Food Experiences Restaurant	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks
14	Pim's Panecillo Restaurant	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	First / 4 forks
15	Theatrum Gastronomic Services	Food, beverages, and entertainment	Restaurant	Second / 3 forks

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the table analyzing the gastronomic establishments selected in the study in relation to their tourism activity, classification, and category, the establishments are organized into four main areas:

Cafés and coffee shops: spaces for social interaction, tradition, and hot beverages (e.g., Fabiolita Café, Los Geranios, Plaza Grande).

Ice cream shops: sweet and refreshing offerings with a strong local identity (Caribe, San Agustín).

Restaurants: traditional dishes and reinterpretations of Quito's cuisine (La Bodega de Cantuña, La Merced Alejita, Pim's Panecillo).

Hotels with gastronomic services: such as Mama Cuchara, which integrates accommodation with culinary offerings.

Regarding tourism activity, classification, and category of the 15 establishments selected in the route, the following were identified: two first-category 5-star hotel restaurants, two first-category cafés with a 1-cup rating, three first-category restaurants with a 4-fork rating, and eight second-category restaurants with a 3-fork rating.

**Table 5.** *Analysis of the Gastronomic Establishments Selected in the Study in Relation to Their Gastronomic Offer.*

No.	Commercial Name	Gastronomic Offer
1	Fabiolita Café	Cathedral coffee and biscuits
2	Los Geranios Tapas & Wine Café	Coffee, empanadas de viento, and canelazo
3	Vista Hermosa Viewpoint Café	Varied menu of food, beverages, and cocktails
4	Plaza Grande Café	À la carte dishes: seco de chivo, guatita
5	Artífice Café	Varied menu of food, beverages, and cocktails
6	El Madrilón Café	Omelette with fruit juices
7	Modelo Café (Historic Center)	Traditional sweets
8	Caribe Ice Cream Shop	Quito-style ponche
9	San Agustín Ice Cream Shop	Fruit ice creams
10	Mama Cuchara Hotel	Varied menu of food, beve

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the table analyzing the gastronomic establishments selected in the study in relation to their gastronomic offer, the following elements are identified:

Quito culinary tradition: biscochos, empanadas de viento, canelazo, seco de chivo, guatita, figs with cheese, green plantain tortillas, and llapingachos.

Innovation and fusion: smoothies with pork (pernil), varied menus with cocktails, and boutique hotel proposals.

Traditional sweets and beverages: Quito-style ponche, fruit ice creams, and traditional sweets.

This demonstrates a balance between culinary heritage and contemporary adaptation.

Overall, these results show how gastronomy and tourism services have evolved from a traditional foundation toward a diversified and contemporary offer. The continuity of historic establishments alongside the emergence of innovative proposals highlights the coexistence of tradition and modernity, which constitutes added value for the cultural and tourist identity of the city. Likewise, the absence of records between 1900 and 1949 raises questions about the socioeconomic factors that may have limited the establishment of new businesses during that period, opening a field for future research. The analysis of the official classification of gastronomic and hotel establishments in Quito reveals how service hierarchy is articulated within a tourism positioning strategy. These establishments function as meeting spaces between tradition and modernity, offering proposals that combine local cuisine with services adapted to a more demanding audience.

In contrast, cafés and ice cream shops classified in basic or intermediate categories sustain the cultural and heritage identity of the city. Although their official classification places them at lower levels, their historical and symbolic value is fundamental for understanding the evolution of consumption habits and the persistence of gastronomic traditions in Quito. The coexistence of these traditional businesses with contemporary proposals reflects a duality that strengthens the diversity of the tourism offer.

Overall, the combination of luxury segments, modern gastronomic experiences, and traditional establishments shapes an image of Quito as a diverse and competitive destination. This diversity not only responds to the demands of international tourism but also preserves the cultural memory of the city, generating a balance between innovation and tradition.

The analysis of the location of gastronomic and hotel establishments in relation to Quito's main tourist attractions reveals a clear strategy of integration between services and cultural heritage. The proximity of cafés and ice cream shops to historic churches and convents, such as San Agustín, Santo Domingo, and La Compañía, reflects how religious and architectural tradition becomes a central axis of attraction that sustains the city's cultural identity. These businesses, although simple in classification, play a fundamental role as spaces of historical continuity and social interaction within the heritage environment.

The coexistence of traditional businesses alongside colonial temples and contemporary proposals near museums and viewpoints reveals a duality that strengthens Quito's competitiveness as a tourist destination. The city successfully articulates tradition and modernity within the same space, offering both the preservation of cultural memory and gastronomic innovation oriented toward international tourism. In this sense, the strategic location of establishments becomes a key factor in enhancing the visitor experience and consolidating Quito's image as a diverse and attractive destination.

The overview of gastronomic establishments in Quito's Historic Center reflects an interesting tension between the preservation of tradition and openness to innovation. On one hand, emblematic products such as biscochos, empanadas de viento, canelazo,

figs with cheese, and green plantain tortillas stand out as symbols of Quito's culinary memory. These elements not only fulfill a nutritional function but also act as cultural markers that convey identity and a sense of belonging.

## CONCLUSIONS

Synthesizing the results obtained from the research, it has been determined that the development of gastronomic establishments in Quito reflects a historical process of cultural and tourism transformation. Between 1850 and 1969, the foundations of culinary tradition were consolidated through emblematic cafés and ice cream shops, marking the beginning of an urban culture of gathering and social interaction. Subsequently, between 1970 and 2009, the emergence of tourist-oriented restaurants evidenced an expansion of the offer driven by the growth of tourism and the need to diversify experiences, integrating gastronomy with leisure and urban culture. Finally, between 2010 and 2022, the incorporation of boutique hotels and innovative proposals demonstrates a commitment to quality and differentiation, influenced by globalization and international tourism, positioning Quito as a competitive destination capable of combining tradition with innovation.

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