

Friction-Induced Wellness in Sasak Culinary Tourism: Narrative Gastronomy and Experiential Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the transformation of sensory and physical friction in Sasak culinary tourism into wellness experiences through narrative gastronomy. A qualitative case study approach was employed in two culinary tourism destinations in Lombok, Indonesia, namely Sade Traditional Village and Bilebante Tourism Village. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of experiential transformation. However, limited attention has been given to how sensory and physical friction in culinary tourism can be transformed into wellness experiences through culturally mediated interpretation, particularly in vernacular culinary contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how discomfort becomes a resource for psychological and emotional transformation. The findings show that tourists initially experience sensory overload, physical discomfort, and culture shock triggered by smoke, heat, strong aromas, and manual cooking practices. Through narrative gastronomy delivered by local actors, these frictions are cognitively reframed into cultural meanings associated with resilience, patience, and communal values. This process facilitates a transition toward mindfulness and flow state, characterized by heightened attention, embodied engagement, and sensory awareness. The experience further generates catharsis, gratitude, and social connectedness through communal food consumption. This study proposes the Friction-Induced Wellness Model as its main contribution. This model is among the first to explain how wellness in culinary tourism emerges not from comfort-based experiences, but through a culturally mediated transformation process involving sensory friction, narrative interpretation, and embodied participation.

INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism has become an important segment of contemporary tourism as tourists increasingly seek psychological restoration, emotional balance, and meaningful life experiences beyond leisure and recreation. The post-pandemic context has reinforced this

shift by placing health, self-awareness, resilience, and subjective well-being at the center of travel decisions. Thus, wellness tourism should be understood not only through spas, retreats, medical relaxation, or luxury facilities, but as an experiential process involving body, mind, culture, social relations, and place-based meaning through active participation and personal transformation (Dillette et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Putrevu & Mertzanis, 2026).

This orientation is closely related to experiential tourism, where tourists seek participation, learning, interaction, and co-creation of meaning with local communities. Experiences become more memorable when tourists engage physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially with destinations. In rural and community-based tourism, everyday cultural practices often become the primary experiential resource. Local food preparation, traditional cooking, and communal eating therefore play an important role in shaping meaningful and wellness-oriented tourism experiences (Campos et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023; Yiannakou et al., 2022; Yu & Na, 2022).

Culinary tourism occupies a central position in this experiential turn because food connects memory, identity, emotion, ecology, and social values. Food is not merely consumed but interpreted as a cultural medium that communicates community history and worldview. Gastronomic experiences become meaningful when tourists engage with ingredients, cooking techniques, food rituals, and social relations embedded in food practices. Therefore, culinary tourism should be understood beyond taste satisfaction, encompassing sensory engagement, symbolic interpretation, cultural communication, and experiential learning (Dordai et al., 2026; Sthapit et al., 2019; M. J. Stone et al., 2018; Sujood et al., 2023).

Cooking-based tourism provides a particularly relevant context for examining the relationship between body, culture, and destination experience. Through direct interaction with ingredients, tools, spatial environments, and cooking techniques, tourists experience destinations through multisensory engagement, including smell, taste, touch, sound, movement, and conversation. Such embodied participation reshapes perception, allowing destinations to be experienced not only as places to visit, but also as spaces to perform, feel, and remember (Aksenova et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024; M. J. Stone et al., 2022).

Recent studies show that memorable culinary tourism experiences are shaped by authenticity, novelty, emotion, learning, and social interaction. However, existing literature still tends to emphasize pleasurable consumption and positive affect, while underexploring the role of discomfort in shaping meaningful experiences. In vernacular culinary settings, authenticity may manifest through smoke, heat, strong aromas, manual labor, and unfamiliar domestic environments, which can initially create sensory and cultural tension for tourists. This indicates that discomfort is an important but under-theorized dimension of culinary tourism experience (Huang et al., 2025; Song & Kim, 2022; M. J. Stone et al., 2019; Tiberghien et al., 2020).

This issue is particularly relevant in Sasak culinary tourism in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, where traditional kitchens expose tourists to hearth heat, wood smoke, pungent shrimp paste, strong chili aroma, manual spice grinding, and communal food rituals. This

study focuses on Desa Adat Sade and Desa Wisata Bilebante, which represent two contrasting contexts: Sade as a highly vernacular and immersive setting, and Bilebante as a more structured rural culinary experience.

The traditional Sasak kitchen presents a paradox for wellness tourism. While wellness is commonly associated with calmness, comfort, cleanliness, and psychological ease, Sasak culinary practices often involve heat, smoke, physical effort, and intense sensory stimulation. This paradox raises a theoretical question: how can experiences that begin with discomfort, sensory overload, and cultural shock be transformed into meaningful wellness outcomes?

Existing literature offers partial explanations but has not fully clarified how discomfort becomes wellness. Studies on authenticity, disorientation, and culinary culture shock suggest that unfamiliar environments may trigger cognitive tension and adaptation processes. However, they do not sufficiently explain how sensory and physical discomfort can be transformed into mindfulness, flow, emotional release, and gratitude through cultural mediation and narrative interpretation (Huang et al., 2025; Tiberghien et al., 2020; Xue & Sun, 2024).

The first research gap lies in the dominant orientation of wellness tourism literature, which primarily focuses on spa-based relaxation, healing environments, and hedonic well-being. Although valuable, this perspective rarely considers culinary labor and embodied cultural practices as potential sources of wellness. In Sasak culinary contexts, cooking involves physical effort, sensory attention, and social interaction, suggesting that wellness may emerge through meaningful engagement with discomfort rather than its avoidance (Dillette et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2025; Sthapit et al., 2023).

The second research gap concerns the limited integration between culinary tourism and psychological transformation. While existing studies explore motivation, authenticity, and food memory, they often overlook sensory strain and embodied challenge as experiential resources. This study argues that fatigue, heat, smoke, and intense sensory exposure can become meaningful when interpreted through narrative gastronomy and cultural framing (Aksenova et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2025; Solano-Sánchez et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2022).

The third research gap relates to the Indonesian and Sasak context, where empirical studies on culinary tourism remain focused on cultural representation and experience design, but rarely address transformation from sensory friction to wellness outcomes. No conceptual model has yet explained how vernacular kitchen experiences, storytelling, cognitive reframing, and psychological outcomes are interconnected in Sasak culinary tourism (Suryana et al., 2025).

To address these gaps, this study introduces the concept of Friction-Induced Wellness, which explains how wellness can emerge from controlled sensory and physical friction when mediated through cultural interpretation and narrative meaning-making. Friction in this context includes heat, smoke, pungent aroma, spicy taste, manual labor, and spatial unfamiliarity. Rather than being treated as experiential barriers, these elements function as

triggers for attention, embodied learning, and cultural appreciation (Reed & Smith, 2023; Tiberghien et al., 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in repositioning wellness not only as an outcome of comfort-based experiences, but also as a transformation emerging from meaningful discomfort. In Sasak culinary tourism, bodily effort and sensory intensity become transformative when supported by cultural narratives emphasizing patience, communal values, and gratitude. This expands wellness tourism literature by positioning friction as a pathway toward mindfulness, emotional release, and embodied cultural learning (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chan, 2019; Iacob et al., 2024).

Narrative gastronomy serves as the key mediating mechanism in this transformation. Local stories related to traditional dishes, cooking practices, and cultural values enable tourists to reinterpret sensory discomfort as meaningful cultural experience. Local actors function as cultural mediators who translate physical strain into historical memory, ethical values, and communal philosophy (Song & Kim, 2022). From a psychological perspective, this transformation is grounded in mindfulness, flow theory, therapeutic cooking, and the Zen-in-the-kitchen perspective. These frameworks explain how attention, immersion, emotional regulation, and reflective awareness emerge during cooking-based tourism experiences, contributing to psychological well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Farmer et al., 2018; Uchiyama, 2005).

Empirically, this study is based on a qualitative case study involving 20 informants, including domestic and international tourists, local culinary actors, and Sasak cultural figures. Data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and documentation in Desa Adat Sade and Desa Wisata Bilebante. Thematic analysis was used to identify experiential trajectories from sensory-cultural friction to psychological transformation. Triangulation was applied to ensure interpretative validity (Creswell, 2017; N. K. Denzin, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

This study ultimately analyzes how tourists interpret sensory and physical friction in Sasak culinary tourism and how narrative gastronomy transforms these experiences into wellness outcomes. It also proposes the Friction-Induced Wellness Model as a theoretical contribution to experiential and wellness tourism literature, while offering practical implications for designing culturally meaningful culinary tourism experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative exploratory case study design to examine tourists' subjective interpretations of sensory and physical friction in Sasak culinary tourism. This approach was selected because the phenomenon is deeply embedded in cultural practices, spatial configurations, and embodied experiences within traditional culinary environments in Lombok, Indonesia. The study focuses on meaning-making processes and experiential transformation, particularly how sensory discomfort is interpreted and reconstructed into

wellness-related outcomes through narrative gastronomy rather than statistical generalization (Creswell, 2017).

Research Setting

The research was conducted in Desa Adat Sade and Desa Wisata Bilebante, Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

- (1) Desa Adat Sade represents a highly vernacular culinary environment characterized by wood-fired cooking, dense smoke exposure, strong spice aromas, limited ventilation, and traditional communal food preparation practices.
- (2) Desa Wisata Bilebante represents a semi-structured rural culinary tourism setting that preserves traditional ingredients and cooking techniques while providing more controlled spatial and educational tourism arrangements.

Both sites were intentionally selected to enable a comparative analysis of varying intensities of sensory-physical friction, which is central to understanding how experiential conditions shape tourist interpretation and wellness transformation.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on direct involvement in Sasak culinary tourism experiences. The study involved 20 informants, consisting of cultural figures, local culinary practitioners, domestic tourists, and international tourists. The sample size was considered adequate based on the principle of thematic saturation, where data collection was continued until no new meaningful themes emerged across interviews and observations, ensuring depth and richness of qualitative insights (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Category	Number	Research Site	Main Data Contribution
Cultural figures	4	Sade and Bilebante	Sasak culinary philosophy, food heritage, Begibung tradition, Sayur Ares interpretation,
Local culinary actors	4	Sade and Bilebante	Cooking practices, traditional utensils, kitchen labor, tourist interaction
International tourists	4	Sade and Bilebante	Sensory shock, cultural disorientation, bodily response, experiential reinterpretation
Domestic tourists	8	Sade and Bilebante	Emotional transition, cultural comparison, mindfulness, wellness perception
Total	20		

Data Collection

Data were collected using triangulated qualitative methods, consisting of:

1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews: To explore sensory perceptions (heat, smoke, taste, aroma), physical responses (fatigue, discomfort), emotional reactions, cultural interpretations, and perceived wellness outcomes.

2. Participant observation: The researcher directly engaged in culinary tourism activities to capture embodied experiences such as cooking processes, ingredient handling, spatial interaction, and social participation.
3. Documentation: Field notes, photographs, and contextual records were used to support and enrich interpretive analysis of experiential data.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using NVivo-assisted thematic analysis, following a structured three-stage coding process:

1. Open coding: Identification of initial experiential categories such as sensory shock, smoke exposure, spice intensity, manual labor, storytelling, mindfulness, flow, catharsis, and gratitude.
2. Axial coding: Grouping of codes into higher-order categories: sensory-physical friction, narrative gastronomy, cognitive and emotional transformation.
3. Selective coding: Integration of categories into core themes: sensory-cultural friction as experiential trigger, narrative gastronomy as cognitive and cultural mediator, wellness transformation as experiential outcome.

The analysis followed an iterative cycle of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification, ensuring systematic interpretation and conceptual rigor (Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and rigor of the findings, this study applied established qualitative validation strategies:

- (1) Triangulation, by comparing data from interviews, observation, and documentation
- (2) Member checking, by validating interpretations with selected informants
- (3) Peer debriefing, by reviewing coding structure and thematic consistency with academic peers

These procedures ensured the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the analysis (Norman K Denzin, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were strictly observed throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All informants were anonymized using coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality. The study maintained a non-judgmental interpretive stance, recognizing Sasak culinary practices as culturally embedded experiential systems rather than evaluative objects

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Sensory and Physical Friction in Sasak Vernacular Kitchens

Sensory and physical friction represents the initial stage of the Friction-Induced Wellness process. Rather than being perceived as immediate relaxation, Sasak culinary tourism exposes tourists to smoke, hearth heat, pungent shrimp paste, strong chili aroma, manual spice grinding, and vernacular kitchen environments. These conditions generate sensory shock, physical fatigue, and cultural disorientation before wellness-related meanings emerge.

A comparative analysis between Desa Adat Sade and Desa Wisata Bilebante shows that sensory friction is spatially constructed rather than uniform. Desa Adat Sade produces stronger disorientation due to enclosed kitchen structures, limited lighting, earthy floors, dense wood smoke, and direct exposure to hearth heat. In contrast, Desa Wisata Bilebante produces moderated friction through semi-open spatial design, improved air circulation, greener surroundings, and guided culinary interpretation. This indicates that friction is shaped by spatial atmosphere, thermal exposure, olfactory intensity, manual labor, and interpretive mediation.

Table 2. Sensory-Spatial Characteristics of Sade and Bilebante

Dimension	Desa Adat Sade	Desa Wisata Bilebante	Analytical Implication
Spatial setting	Enclosed vernacular kitchen with limited lighting	Semi-open rural cooking space	Sade generates stronger disorientation, while Bilebante supports guided experience
Thermal exposure	High heat from wood-fired hearths	Moderate rural temperature	Heat acts as primary bodily friction
Olfactory condition	Dense smoke, shrimp paste, chili aroma	Fresher herbal and cooking	Smell influences early acceptance or resistance
Physical activity	Intensive manual spice grinding	Guided cooking participation	Fatigue becomes meaningful through cultural framing

Interview and observational data show that tourists initially experienced coughing, eye irritation, sweating, hesitation, and muscular fatigue during cooking activities. International tourists tended to compare Sasak kitchens with modern culinary environments characterized by cleanliness, ventilation, brightness, and efficiency. Meanwhile, domestic urban tourists expressed surprise at smoke intensity, earthy floors, heat exposure, and manual food preparation processes. These responses indicate that the culinary experience does not begin with consumption, but with embodied negotiation of unfamiliar sensory environments. In this stage, authenticity is initially perceived as discomfort rather than aesthetic appreciation.

This finding extends the concept of culinary culture shock by demonstrating that sensory disruption occurs before tasting, through multisensory exposure involving space, smell, heat, touch, breathing, and physical effort. The Sasak kitchen functions as a sensory-spatial arena where authenticity is encountered through embodied friction rather than visual or symbolic representation alone (Aksenova et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2025; Tiberghien et al., 2020). Manual spice grinding, combined with exposure to wood smoke and hearth heat,

further intensifies bodily engagement, producing layered sensory experiences that go beyond taste-oriented tourism consumption,

The findings also reveal a clear dissonance between wellness expectations and actual experiential conditions. Tourists generally associate wellness with calmness, comfort, cleanliness, and sensory ease. However, Sasak culinary environments introduce heat, smoke, pungency, physical effort, and sensory overload. This contradiction positions friction not as failure, but as a transformative experiential mechanism (Reed & Smith, 2023; Xue & Sun, 2024).

However, without cultural mediation, such friction may be interpreted as inconvenience. Therefore, experiential design should incorporate interpretive framing, guided participation, and contextual explanation to transform discomfort into meaningful engagement. Controlled exposure, hygiene assurance, and narrative interpretation are essential to support learning, participation, and perceived well-being in culinary tourism settings (Farmer et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2024; Song & Kim, 2022).

b. Narrative Gastronomy as a Cognitive Buffer

Narrative gastronomy represents the second stage of the Friction-Induced Wellness process, functioning as a cognitive buffer that mediates tourists' interpretation of sensory and physical friction encountered in Sasak culinary tourism. After experiencing smoke, heat, pungent aroma, spicy ingredients, manual grinding, and unfamiliar kitchen environments, tourists begin to reinterpret these initially disruptive stimuli through culturally embedded storytelling provided by local actors.

Storytelling is not external to the culinary activity but is embedded within the cooking process itself. Local actors explain Sayur Ares as a symbol of food resilience, Begibung as a representation of communal equality, and manual spice grinding as an expression of patience, discipline, and respect for ingredients. These narratives link bodily effort with Sasak cultural values such as endurance, togetherness, humility, and gratitude. In this sense, culinary tourism becomes meaningful when food is not only consumed but also interpreted through memory, identity, symbolism, and cultural knowledge.

Local chefs and cultural figures function as cultural mediators, translating technical cooking practices into cultural meanings. Their explanations reposition traditional cooking from a perception of inefficiency or discomfort into a culturally meaningful system that emphasizes slowness, collective labor, and embodied learning. This interpretive mediation enables tourists to move beyond modern assumptions of efficiency, standardization, and comfort, and instead recognize the vernacular kitchen as a living cultural space that encodes social values and local epistemology.

From a theoretical perspective, narrative gastronomy integrates food storytelling, culinary disorientation, experiential learning, mindfulness, and therapeutic cooking. These perspectives explain how unfamiliar culinary environments shift from resistance to meaning

through interpretation, and how embodied cooking practices facilitate attention regulation, emotional engagement, and psychological well-being (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

NVivo-assisted thematic analysis confirms this transformation process by organizing experiential data into three interrelated dimensions: sensory-physical culture shock, narrative gastronomy as cognitive mediation, and wellness transformation as experiential outcome.

Table 3. Thematic Coding Matrix from NVivo Analysis

Empirical Evidence	Open Coding	Axial Category	Selective Theme
Tourists experienced coughing, eye irritation, heat exposure, and arm fatigue during initial kitchen engagement	Smoke exposure, pungent aroma, physical fatigue	Sensory overload and bodily strain	Sensory-physical culture shock
Local actors explained Sayur Ares, Begibung, food resilience, and patience in spice grinding	Culinary storytelling, communal philosophy, cultural meaning	Narrative interpretation and cognitive reframing	Narrative gastronomy as cognitive buffer
Tourists shifted attention toward grinding rhythm, aroma perception, breathing awareness, and ingredient transformation	Bodily focus, sensory attention, rhythmic engagement	Mindful embodied engagement	Wellness transformation
Tourists expressed relief, gratitude, appreciation, and emotional release after cooking experience	Catharsis, gratitude, emotional relief	Positive affective outcome	Friction-Induced Wellness

Table 3 demonstrates that tourist experiences evolve through a sequential transformation from sensory-physical culture shock to narrative mediation and ultimately wellness outcomes. Narrative gastronomy functions as a cognitive buffering mechanism that transforms discomfort into meaningful engagement by redirecting attention from sensory disturbance toward cultural interpretation and embodied learning (Xue & Sun, 2024).

Within this process, manual activities such as spice grinding are reinterpreted as symbolic practices representing patience and resilience, while communal dining practices are understood as expressions of social equality and collective identity. As a result, physical fatigue is no longer perceived as discomfort alone, but as participation, achievement, and cultural connection (Conner et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2018; M. J. Stone et al., 2022).

This cognitive mediation also strengthens mindful engagement, as tourists begin to focus on sensory details such as rhythm of movement, aroma intensity, texture variation, and collective coordination. Sensory overload gradually shifts into structured awareness, aligning with mindfulness theory that emphasizes present-moment attention, non-judgmental awareness, and embodied perception (Iacob et al., 2024).

Overall, narrative gastronomy operates as a central mechanism in the Friction-Induced Wellness model by converting sensory and physical friction into meaningful cultural participation through cognitive reframing, emotional engagement, and embodied learning.

c. Mindfulness, Flow, and Emotional Transformation

The third finding indicates that tourists' experiences shift from culture shock toward mindfulness and flow states following the cognitive reframing of sensory-physical friction through narrative gastronomy. Initially, tourists respond to smoke, heat, pungent aroma, spicy ingredients, and manual grinding through bodily resistance and sensory overload. However, once local narratives provide cultural interpretation, tourists begin to redirect attention toward breathing, hand movement, grinding rhythm, ingredient texture, aroma transformation, and collective cooking practices.

This shift demonstrates that mindfulness in Sasak culinary tourism does not emerge from immediate comfort, but from culturally mediated attention to embodied experience. Sensory intensity is no longer rejected as discomfort but gradually becomes an object of conscious awareness. In this state, tourists exhibit heightened attentiveness to present-moment sensory and bodily processes during cooking activities.

Mindfulness is particularly evident in repetitive culinary actions such as spice grinding and ingredient preparation. These activities encourage slowing down, sustained attention, and non-reactive engagement with sensory stimuli. Consequently, sensory friction is transformed from external disturbance into structured awareness. This finding aligns with mindfulness theory, which conceptualizes mindfulness as present-moment attention, openness to bodily sensation, and reduced automatic emotional reactivity (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Iacob et al., 2024).

Flow state emerges when tourists become deeply absorbed in the rhythm and sequence of cooking activities. Manual spice grinding and food preparation create a balance between challenge and skill, requiring concentration, coordination, and sustained effort while remaining achievable under local guidance. This balance reduces cognitive distraction and enhances intrinsic engagement.

Within this context, Sasak cooking functions as an embodied flow activity, where repetitive movement, sensory immersion, and cultural meaning converge to produce optimal experiential involvement. This interpretation is consistent with flow theory, which emphasizes challenge-skill balance, focused attention, and intrinsic motivation as core conditions of optimal experience (Conner et al., 2018; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The transition from culture shock to mindfulness and flow is not automatic but depends on the interaction between sensory friction, cultural interpretation, and experiential facilitation. Without narrative mediation, smoke, heat, pungency, and fatigue may remain negative stimuli. However, when these stimuli are culturally interpreted, they are redefined as expressions of Sasak culinary identity, resilience, patience, and communal values. This supports the argument that disorienting tourism experiences can become productive when

supported by meaningful cultural framing rather than evaluated solely through comfort-based standards (Huang et al., 2025; Tiberghien et al., 2020; Xue & Sun, 2024).

The therapeutic dimension of cooking is further evident in the structured experiential sequence: observing ingredients, receiving cultural explanations, engaging in manual preparation, cooking collectively, and participating in communal dining. This structured process provides order, focus, social interaction, and tangible outcomes in the form of shared meals. Such sequencing is important because cooking-based experiences can support emotional regulation and psychological well-being through meaning-making, accomplishment, agency, and social connection (Farmer et al., 2018; M. J. Stone et al., 2022).

From a culinary tourism perspective, this transformation demonstrates that experiences become more memorable not merely through consumption, but through active participation in food production. Tourists connect sensory elements such as fatigue, aroma, texture, and taste with cultural narratives surrounding Sayur Ares, Begibung, patience, and gratitude. The resulting experience is memorable not because it is entirely pleasurable, but because it integrates authenticity, embodied effort, emotional intensity, and symbolic meaning (Aksenova et al., 2022; Sthapit et al., 2019; M. J. Stone. et al., 2018).

The Sasak case expands the conceptualization of mindfulness in tourism by demonstrating that mindfulness can emerge from everyday cultural practices rather than formal contemplative settings. Tourists do not engage in structured meditation, but instead experience mindfulness through grinding, smelling, tasting, sweating, listening, and interacting with local actors. The kitchen thus becomes a site of active embodied awareness, where sensory pressure is reorganized into attention, patience, and appreciation (Wu et al., 2023).

This transformation also contains a social dimension of wellness. Communal cooking and Begibung practices foster interaction between tourists, local chefs, and community members, shifting the experience from individual sensory confrontation to collective participation. In this sense, wellness tourism extends beyond individual psychological states to include social connection, belonging, and shared cultural engagement.

Overall, mindfulness and flow emerge as psychological outcomes of mediated sensory friction. Culture shock initially disrupts habitual perception, but narrative gastronomy and guided culinary participation redirect attention toward rhythm, movement, sensory detail, and social interaction. Within the Friction-Induced Wellness framework, culture shock is not an endpoint of discomfort but a transitional stage toward wellness when it is culturally interpreted, embodied, and collectively experienced.

d. Friction-Induced Wellness Model

The findings from the previous subsections indicate that wellness in Sasak culinary tourism emerges through a sequential and structured transformation process, rather than as an immediate outcome of comfort or relaxation. Tourists initially encounter sensory and physical friction in the form of smoke, heat, pungent aroma, spicy taste, manual grinding, and

unfamiliar vernacular kitchen environments. This friction generates culture shock and bodily resistance, which subsequently becomes the entry point for experiential transformation.

The Friction-Induced Wellness Model explains how sensory-physical discomfort is progressively transformed into wellness outcomes through culturally mediated interpretation and embodied participation. The model consists of six interconnected stages: (1) sensory-physical friction, (2) narrative gastronomy, (3) cognitive reframing, (4) mindfulness and flow state, (5) catharsis and gratitude, and (6) wellness transformation. Each stage represents a distinct layer of experiential processing, moving from bodily disruption to psychological and emotional restoration.

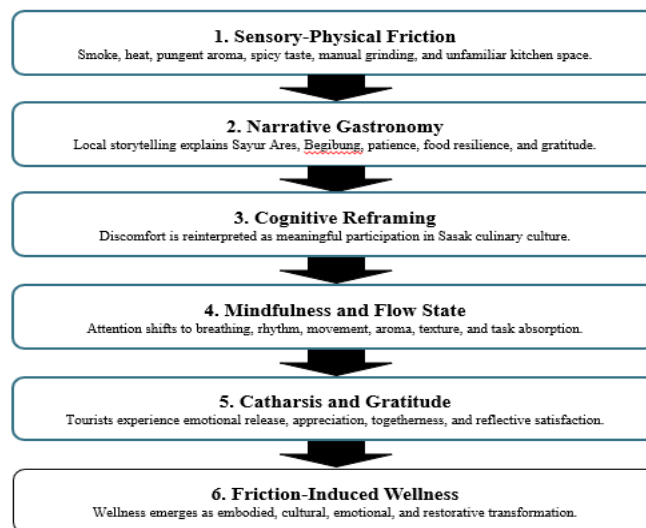


Figure 1. Friction-Induced Wellness Model

The model shows that friction is not eliminated but reconfigured through cultural interpretation. Unlike conventional wellness tourism that emphasizes comfort and relaxation, this study demonstrates that controlled discomfort can function as a catalyst for experiential transformation when supported by narrative mediation and guided participation.

The first stage, sensory-physical friction, reflects direct bodily encounters with heat, smoke, aroma, and manual labor. The second stage, narrative gastronomy, provides cultural interpretation through storytelling about Sayur Ares, Begibung, and values such as patience, resilience, and gratitude. The third stage, cognitive reframing, represents the shift in perception where discomfort is reinterpreted as meaningful participation rather than disturbance.

The fourth stage, mindfulness and flow state, reflects deep attentional engagement with cooking activities, where rhythm, movement, and sensory awareness become central. The fifth stage, catharsis and gratitude, represents emotional release and reflective appreciation through communal cooking and shared experiences. The final stage, wellness transformation, indicates the emergence of subjective well-being grounded in embodied, cultural, and social engagement (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Farmer et al., 2018).

Empirical Validation of the Model

Table 4 confirms that each stage of the model is empirically grounded in field data from Desa Adat Sade and Desa Wisata Bilebante. Sensory-physical friction is evidenced through tourists' bodily responses to smoke, heat, and manual cooking practices. Narrative gastronomy emerges through cultural storytelling by local actors. Cognitive reframing is reflected in changing interpretations of discomfort. Mindfulness and flow appear during repetitive cooking activities requiring sustained attention. Catharsis and gratitude emerge during communal dining and post-experience reflection.

Table 4. Friction-Induced Wellness Conceptual Model

Stage	Empirical Indicator	Transformative Mechanism	Wellness Output
Sensory-physical friction	Smoke, heat, pungent aroma, spicy taste, manual grinding.	Bodily disruption and culture shock	Initial discomfort and attention shift
Narrative gastronomy	Stories of Sayur Ares, Begibung, resilience, gratitude	Cultural interpretation and meaning-making	Acceptance of discomfort
Cognitive reframing	Reinterpretation of fatigue, aroma, and heat as participation	Shift in evaluative perception	Deeper engagement
Mindfulness and flow state	Focus on rhythm, breathing, aroma, and texture	Emotional integration	Calmness and embodied absorption
Catharsis and gratitude	Emotional release and communal reflection	Emotional release and social connection	Gratitude and restoration
Wellness transformation	Reflective satisfaction and embodied learning	Holistic integration	Subjective well-being

The model contributes to culinary tourism literature by repositioning traditional cooking as an embodied transformative system, rather than merely a cultural attraction. While previous studies emphasize authenticity, memory, and experiential value, this study demonstrates that experiential value can also emerge through managed friction, where discomfort becomes meaningful through participation and interpretation (Aksenova et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024; Matthew J Stone et al., 2018).

Narrative gastronomy plays a central role in this transformation by mediating sensory and physical friction. Without cultural storytelling, vernacular kitchens may be perceived as uncomfortable or inefficient under modern standards of hygiene and convenience. Through narrative framing, the same conditions are reinterpreted as expressions of cultural identity, communal ethics, and culinary heritage. This supports the argument that disorienting experiences can become productive when supported by structured cultural interpretation (Huang et al., 2025; Tiberghien et al., 2020; Xue & Sun, 2024).

From a psychological perspective, the model is grounded in mindfulness, flow theory, and therapeutic cooking literature. Repetitive culinary activities such as grinding, stirring, and collective preparation generate sustained attention and emotional regulation, leading to

psychological restoration through embodied engagement (Conner et al., 2018)(Iacob et al., 2024)(Farmer et al., 2018)(Wu et al., 2023).

Overall, the Friction-Induced Wellness Model demonstrates that wellness in Sasak culinary tourism is not a pre-existing condition of comfort, but a process of transformation emerging through culturally mediated friction, embodied participation, and social interaction. Friction is therefore repositioned as a generative mechanism for experiential depth and well-being.

e. Theoretical Implications

This study advances wellness tourism theory by challenging the dominant assumption that wellness is primarily generated through comfort, relaxation, and low-intensity sensory environments. The findings demonstrate that structured sensory and physical friction can function as a productive mechanism for experiential transformation when mediated through narrative gastronomy and cultural interpretation.

The proposed Friction-Induced Wellness Model contributes to experiential tourism literature by repositioning discomfort as a constitutive rather than disruptive element of tourism experience. Unlike conventional models that emphasize hedonic satisfaction, this study shows that wellness can emerge through embodied engagement with sensory intensity, cultural unfamiliarity, and physical effort.

Furthermore, this study extends culinary tourism theory by integrating sensory friction, narrative mediation, and embodied cognition into a unified explanatory framework. Culinary experiences are not only understood as consumption activities but as interpretive and embodied processes in which meaning is constructed through interaction between tourists, food practices, and cultural narratives.

From a psychological perspective, this study contributes to mindfulness and flow theory by demonstrating that both states can be activated in everyday cultural practices, not only in controlled or contemplative environments. Mindfulness emerges through sustained sensory attention during cooking activities, while flow arises when physical effort, task structure, and cultural meaning are balanced within immersive culinary engagement

f. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for culinary tourism development, particularly in community-based and rural destinations.

First, destination managers should recognize that sensory and physical friction is not necessarily a barrier, but can be a valuable experiential resource when appropriately managed. Instead of eliminating traditional elements such as smoke, manual cooking, and strong aromas, these elements should be maintained within a controlled and interpretive experience design.

Second, local actors play a central role as narrative mediators. Training in storytelling and cultural interpretation is essential so that chefs and community members can explain

culinary practices such as *Sayur Ares* and *Begibung* in ways that transform discomfort into cultural understanding. This enhances both experiential quality and cultural preservation.

Third, culinary tourism experiences should be designed with a balance between authenticity and interpretive guidance. While authenticity provides sensory richness, narrative mediation ensures that tourists interpret friction as meaningful cultural engagement rather than operational deficiency.

Finally, this study supports a shift in tourism development strategy from comfort-centered design to meaning-centered experiential design. In this approach, wellness is not produced by minimizing sensory intensity, but by enabling tourists to engage, interpret, and emotionally process culturally embedded experiences in a structured and supported environment.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that Sasak culinary tourism generates an initial condition of sensory and physical friction characterized by smoke, heat, pungent aroma, spicy ingredients, manual cooking processes, and unfamiliar vernacular kitchen environments. Rather than functioning as barriers to experience, these elements become the entry point for experiential transformation. Through narrative gastronomy, sensory and physical discomfort is cognitively reframed into meaningful cultural understanding, enabling tourists to shift from initial resistance toward deeper engagement, where embodied participation fosters mindfulness, flow state, emotional release (catharsis), gratitude, and social connectedness.

The Friction-Induced Wellness Model developed in this study demonstrates that wellness in culinary tourism is not a passive outcome of comfort or relaxation, but a dynamic process of meaning-making emerging through structured sensory friction, cultural interpretation, and embodied experience. The study contributes to wellness and culinary tourism literature by repositioning friction as a productive mechanism of experiential transformation rather than a condition to be eliminated. It also extends experiential tourism theory by integrating sensory friction, narrative gastronomy, and embodied cognition into a unified explanatory framework of wellness formation.

However, this study is limited by its qualitative case study design, which restricts generalizability across different cultural and geographical contexts. In addition, although systematic coding procedures were applied, the interpretation of experiential data remains inherently subjective. Future research is encouraged to validate the Friction-Induced Wellness Model using mixed-method or quantitative approaches and to test its applicability in other culinary and cultural tourism contexts to strengthen its external validity.

From a practical perspective, destination managers are encouraged to preserve vernacular culinary authenticity while ensuring safety, hygiene, and structured visitor facilitation. Local actors should be strengthened as cultural narrators who can translate culinary practices into meaningful storytelling that enhances tourist interpretation and engagement. Furthermore, culinary tourism design should integrate embodied participation

and narrative mediation, enabling a shift from comfort-centered tourism toward meaning-centered wellness experiences, where authenticity, participation, and interpretation jointly generate experiential value.

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