

Developing Tourism Routes for Michelin Guide Restaurants in Udon Thani Province

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Abstract

This study aims to develop feasible food tourism routes for Michelin Guide restaurants in Udon Thani Province. Using document research and qualitative spatial analysis, data were collected from Michelin Guide 2025 listings, Google Maps, and observation records. The analysis covered restaurant

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locations, operating hours, travel distances, and times. A complete 10-restaurant route (31.5 km, 97 minutes excluding meals) was identified, but practical constraints limit visiting all restaurants in one day. Therefore, alternative routes of 2–4 restaurants were designed based on cuisine type and opening hours. The findings suggest that smaller route clusters enhance feasibility, reduce duplicate travel, and meet diverse tourist preferences. The development of such routes supports local economic growth, promotes Isan food identity, and aligns with sustainable tourism. Recommendations include digital food map development using GIS, AI, and AR, as well as public–private collaboration to integrate food tourism into provincial policies.

Keywords: *Food Tourism, Gastronomy, Tourism Route, Michelin Guide, Udon Thani*

Introduction

Food tourism is a rapidly growing segment in Thailand, and Udon Thani stands out as a hub for Isan culinary heritage. Recognition from the Michelin Guide highlights the province’s potential to attract tourists through its distinctive cuisine. Despite this, there has been no systematic development of official food tourism routes. Tourists often prefer convenient one-day itineraries to experience multiple restaurants. However, constraints such as opening hours, appetite, budget, and travel time hinder the feasibility of visiting all 10 Michelin Guide restaurants in a single day.

Objective

1. To develop a one-day food tourism route covering Michelin Guide restaurants in Udon Thani Province.
2. To design practical alternative route clusters of 2–4 restaurants.
3. To highlight the role of Isan food in promoting cultural and economic sustainability.
4. To propose strategies using digital technologies (GIS, AI, AR) for food tourism promotion.

Literature Review

Gastronomy tourism is a significant form of cultural tourism and a key economic driver, attracting tourists to local cuisine and markets (Vinokurova & Konopleva, 2024). It enhances a region's identity and brand while promoting cultural exchange and sustainable development. Research confirms that food tourism creates jobs and stimulates local businesses (Linda et al., 2024; Nikola et al., 2024), with South Korea showing a substantial economic contribution of \$5.56 billion in 2019 (Choi & Choi, 2022).

The Michelin Guide plays a pivotal role in this sector, evolving from a motorists' guide into a global authority on dining (Romanchuk et al., 2022). The guide originated in France in 1900 to encourage motorists to travel, thereby increasing the demand for cars and tires. Its star-rating system has since become one of the most prestigious culinary awards globally. The guide's expansion into Thailand in 2017, initially focusing on Bangkok before expanding to other provinces like Phuket, Chiang Mai, and the Isan region, has significantly elevated the international profile of Thai cuisine and stimulated local economies by boosting culinary tourism. Its recommendations significantly boost a restaurant's reputation and influence consumer choices (Şahin et al., 2021).

This recognition presents a prime opportunity to develop tourism routes centered around these certified establishments (Chaigasem et al., 2023). A prominent example is Macau, which has successfully leveraged its high concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants to brand itself as a UNESCO "Creative City of Gastronomy." Research shows that Macau actively uses the Michelin Guide's prestige as a core component of its tourism development strategy, creating a successful model for attracting high-value tourists (Guo & Hsu, 2023). For an example within Thailand, research on Phuket Old Town demonstrates how the introduction of the Michelin Guide has influenced local gastronomy. The study by Chaigasem et al. (2023) shows that the guide's assessment criteria have encouraged local restaurants to elevate their standards while emphasizing authentic, local culinary heritage. This has, in turn, strengthened Phuket's brand as a premier food tourism destination, providing a successful domestic model for leveraging the Michelin Guide's prestige.

The development of a successful tourism route is a strategic process that goes beyond simply connecting points on a map. According to Nordin (2003), effective route planning involves creating a thematic narrative that links various attractions, providing a cohesive and memorable journey for the

tourist. Key principles include ensuring accessibility, providing clear information, and fostering collaboration among local stakeholders.

Successful gastronomy routes globally often serve as benchmarks. The Napa Valley Wine Route in California, for example, is a classic success story attributed to strong collaborative marketing, excellent infrastructure, and the clustering of diverse experiences including fine dining and boutique hotels (Nordin, 2003). Similarly, the Penang Street Food Trail in Malaysia is a prominent example, with its success stemming from the preservation of authentic culinary heritage and strong government support. Effective food tourism route planning can be achieved by applying Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to combine spatial data on restaurant locations, nearby attractions, and tourist preferences. For example, a food tourism planning support system in Japan integrated Web-GIS with route-creation modules to align eatery stops and sightseeing spots in an optimized itinerary. (Hirano & Yamamoto, 2022) However, extant literature still lacks a systematic, context-specific model for developing such routes in a provincial setting like Udon Thani, representing a research gap this study aims to fill.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using document research and spatial analysis. The research process consisted of three main stages:

1. Data sources

The data for this study were collected from secondary sources, including:

- The official Michelin Guide 2025 list of recommended restaurants in Udon Thani.
- Google Maps for precise location data, distance calculations, and travel time estimations.
- An observation record form to systematically compile details such as operating hours and menu specialties from official online sources.

2. Route design and analysis

The data analysis was conducted in two parts:

- Spatial Analysis: All restaurant locations were plotted on Google Maps. The platform's routing function was used to analyze spatial relationships and design an optimized 10-

restaurant route, as well as smaller alternative routes, to ensure maximum efficiency and minimal backtracking.

- Qualitative Analysis: Data from observation records, such as cuisine type and restaurant characteristics, were thematically analyzed to group the restaurants into practical, themed clusters that cater to different tourist preferences.

Results

Eleven restaurants in Mueang Udon Thani District were recognized in the Michelin Guide 2025. These include Kao.Piak.Sen, Peng Duck Noodles, Lab Mu Worachai, Krua Khun Nid, Pa Noi Beef Noodles, Baan Chik Pork Noodles, Som Tum Jae Kai (Asavamit Road), Khao Soi Thai Yai, Rabiang Patchanee, Majchapasuk, and Samuay & Sons. With Samuay & Sons temporarily closed, ten restaurants were included in this study, and their details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Details of michelin guide 2025 recommended restaurants in Udon Thani

Restaurant	Operating hours	Address	Recommended menu	Key details
Kao.Piak.Sen	5:30 AM – 6:00 PM	20/20 Sri Suk Rd., Soi 4, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani	rice vermicelli, vietnamese pork sausage	breakfast specialty; Air-conditioned
Peng duck noodles	7:00 AM – 3:00 PM	439 Nong Tao Lek Road, Ban Lueam, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	duck noodles, stewed beef	air-conditioned
Lab mu Worachai	8:30 AM – 8:30 PM	26/3 Posri Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	minced pork salad (larb moo), bamboo shoot soup, papaya salad with fermented fish	specializes in spicy Isan cuisine

Table 1 Details of michelin guide 2025 recommended restaurants in Udon Thani (continue)

Restaurant	Operating hours	Address	Recommended menu	Key details
Krua khun Nid	10:00 AM – 8:00 PM	64 Soi Nonnivet 1, Udon Dussadi Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	bamboo shoot & yarrow curry, "sloppy" curry (gaeng preh)	authentic local Isan menu; air- conditioned
Pa Noi beef noodles	7:30 AM – 6:00 PM	57/8 Sisuttha Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	beef noodle soup, beef meatballs	features a signature tamarind chili paste
Baan Chik pork noodles	7:30 AM – 2:00 PM	89/3-4 Naresoun Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	tom yum pork noodles, stewed pork	serves homemade noodles
Som tum Jae Kai (Asavamit road)	8:00 AM – 4:00 PM	230/28 Asavamit Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	Thai papaya salad (som tam Thai), papaya salad with fermented fish & crab	known for its spicy flavors
Khao soi Thai Yai	9:00 AM – 4:00 PM	331/4 Mu 5, Promprakai Road, Mak Khaeng, Mueang Udon Thani, Udon Thani	chicken khao soi	specializes in Northern Thai food; homemade Sai Ua sausage
Rabiang Patchanee	10:30 AM – 11:00 PM	53/1 Bannon Road, Ban Lueam, Mueang Udon Thani	som tam, salmon salad, spicy pork rib soup (tom zaab)	air-conditioned

Table 1 Details of michelin guide 2025 recommended restaurants in Udon Thani (continue)

Restaurant	Operating hours	Address	Recommended menu	Key details
Majchapasuk	10:00 AM – 9:00 PM	166 Mu 8, Udon-Nong Khai Road, Mu Mon, Mueang Udon Thani	local river fish dishes (e.g., sea bass, snakehead fish)	authentic local Isan menu and waterside hut atmosphere

Source: Data compiled by researchers

From Table 1, restaurants listed in the Michelin Guide in Udon Thani Province have varied operating hours, giving tourists flexible options for trip planning. Kao.Piak.Sen, the earliest opener at 5:30 AM, is perfect for a light breakfast of Khao Piek Sen and Moo Yor. Restaurants like Peng Duck Noodles (7:00 AM) and Lab Mu Worachai (8:30 AM) are excellent choices for a second meal of the day. For midday and afternoon dining, Pa Noi Beef Noodles, Baan Chik Pork Noodles, Som Tum Jae Kai (Asavamit Road), and Khao Soi Thai Yai offer diverse menus ranging from rich noodles to som tam and Northern Thai cuisine. In the evening, tourists can enjoy a variety of dishes at Krua Khun Nid, Rabiang Patchanee, and Majchapasuk, with Rabiang Patchanee closing the latest at 11:00 PM, making it an ideal final stop for a relaxed dinner. This variety ensures that tourists can enjoy a full day of food tourism, starting with an early breakfast at Kao.Piak.Sen and ending with a late-night meal at Rabiang Patchanee.

Udon Thani's diverse culinary scene reflects the region's unique food culture. Isan cuisine is the most prominent, accounting for 36% of the restaurants, with dishes like larb moo, bamboo shoot soup, and som tam pu pla ra found at Lab Mu Worachai, Som Tum Jae Kai (Asavamit Road), Krua Khun Nid, and Rabiang Patchanee. Noodles are also very popular, making up 27% of the offerings, including duck noodles from Peng Duck Noodles, beef noodles from Pa Noi Beef Noodles, and pork tom yum noodles from Baan Chik Pork Noodles. Other specialties include Northern Thai food, such as khao soi kai and sai ua from Khao Soi Thai Yai, and local breakfast items like khao piak sen and mu yo from Kao.Piak.Sen. For those seeking fusion cuisine, Rabiang Patchanee offers unique dishes that blend Thai and international flavors, such as salmon salad and tom zap, while Majchapasuk is known for its distinctive river fish specialties like grilled fish and sea bass.

Planning a successful one-day tour of Udon Thani's ten Michelin Guide 2025 restaurants, all located in the Mueang District, requires a systematic approach. To maximize convenience and efficiency, an optimal route must be designed by analyzing each restaurant's operating hours, cuisine type, and the travel time between them. The researchers employed Google Maps for this spatial analysis, resulting in the food tourism route presented in Figure 1.

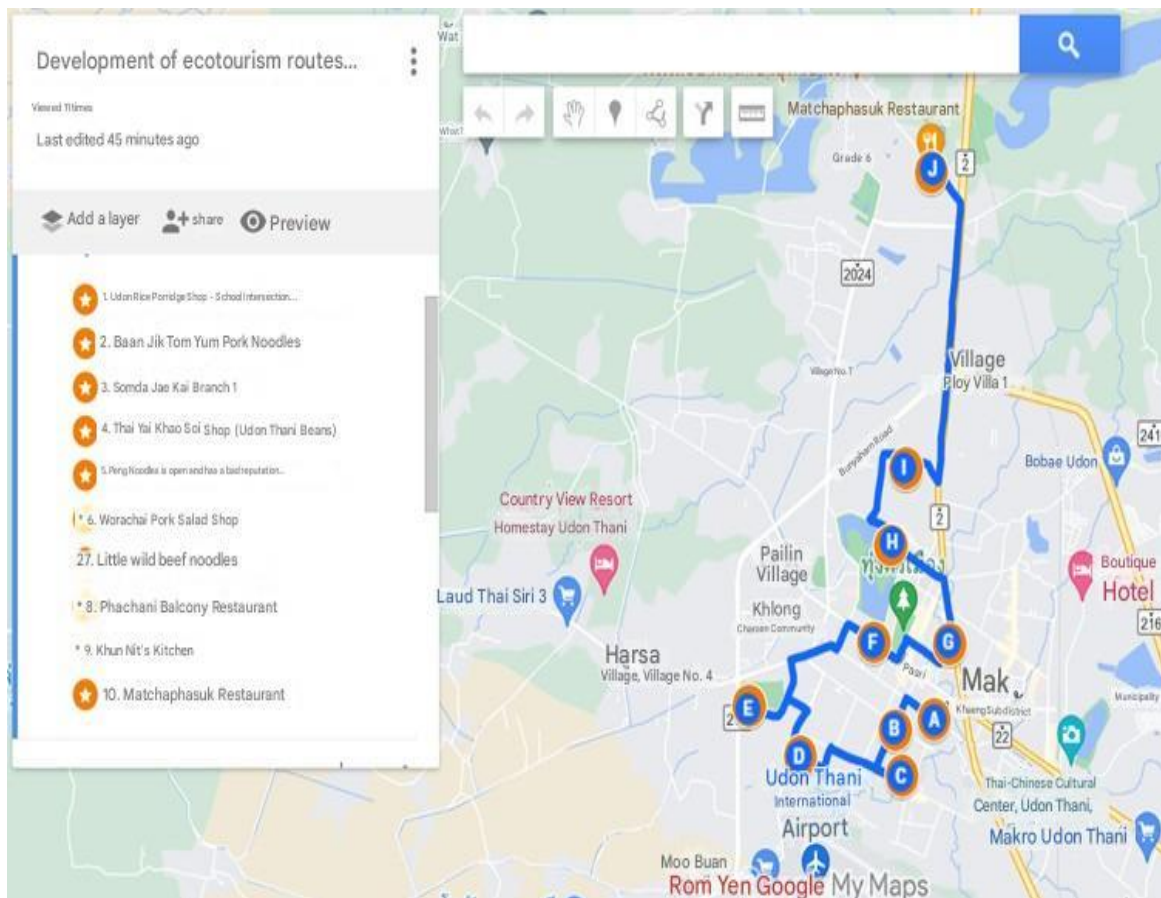


Figure 1 Michelin guide 2025 food tourism route, Udon Thani

Source: Developed by the researcher using google maps

Figure 1 illustrates the optimized food tourism route, designed to connect all ten of Udon Thani's Michelin Guide restaurants. The route is structured as a circular path to maximize efficiency by minimizing redundant travel. It strategically begins at Kao.Piak.Sen in the city center and concludes at Majchapasuk in the outer Mu Mon District, creating a logical progression that enhances the convenience and overall experience for tourists exploring the province's diverse cuisine.

Table 2 Travel times and distances, michelin guide 2025 food tourism route, Udon Thani

Number	From (shop)	Go (to the store)	Distance (km)	Travel time (minutes)
1	Kao.Piak.Sen	Baan Chik pork noodles	2.8	9
2	Baan Chik pork noodles	Som tum Jae Kai (Asavamit road)	3.5	11
3	Som tum Jae Kai (Asavamit road)	Khao soi Thai Yai	4.2	12
4	Khao soi Thai Yai	Peng duck noodles	3.0	10
5	Peng duck noodles	Lab mu Worachai	2.5	8
6	Lab mu Worachai	Pa Noi beef noodles	2.8	9
7	Pa Noi beef noodles	Rabiang Patchanee	3.7	11
8	Rabiang Patchanee	Krua Khun Nid	4.0	12
9	Krua Khun Nid	Majchapasuk	5.0	15
Total			31.5	97

As shown in Table 2, the complete one-day tour covers a total driving distance of 31.5 km and a travel time of 97 minutes (excluding dining). While theoretically possible, this full itinerary presents practical challenges for most tourists.

Alternative feasible routes

Given the practical challenges of the full tour, three alternative, focused routes are proposed:

- **Route A – breakfast & noodles:**

An 8.3 km journey taking about 30 minutes, this route includes Kao.Piak.Sen, Peng Duck Noodles, and Baan Chik Pork Noodles.

- **Route B – Isan cuisine:**

Focusing on the region's prominent food type, this route covers 12.5 km in approximately 40 minutes and features Lab Mu Worachai, Som Tum Jae Kai (Asavamit Road), Krua Khun Nid, and Rabiang Patchanee.

- **Route C – Northern & fusion:**

This 9.0 km route lasts around 35 minutes and includes Khao Soi Thai Yai, Rabiang Patchanee, and Majchapasuk.

These smaller routes provide flexibility while still highlighting the diverse culinary offerings, making a Michelin-focused food tour more accessible.

Discussion

The findings indicate that while a comprehensive 10-restaurant route is theoretically possible, practical limitations make smaller, themed clusters a more feasible and effective solution for tourists. The design of these alternative routes addresses the logistical challenges tourists face, such as limited time and appetite, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience. This approach aligns with literature that emphasizes the importance of practical and manageable itineraries in tourism planning. Furthermore, the study's focus on Isan cuisine (36% of offerings) and other local specialties reinforces Udon Thani's unique culinary identity, turning it into a tangible tourism product. By guiding tourists to local establishments, these routes directly contribute to the community economy, creating a sustainable model where cultural preservation and economic benefits are intertwined. The use of GIS as a foundational tool for route optimization demonstrates a practical application of technology in tourism development, creating a replicable model for other provincial destinations.

It is important to acknowledge a key limitation of this study: the proposed routes are highly specialized, focusing exclusively on Michelin-recognized dining establishments. These itineraries are intentionally designed for a niche group of "gastronomic tourists" or "foodies" whose primary travel

motivation is to experience a curated list of acclaimed restaurants. For a general tourist, who typically seeks a mix of attractions, activities, and dining, these food-centric routes would likely not be feasible as a standalone itinerary. Future research could therefore focus on integrating these Michelin-starred restaurants as key culinary stops within broader, more diversified tourism routes that also include cultural sites and local attractions.

Conclusion

This research successfully developed a series of food tourism routes for Michelin Guide restaurants in Udon Thani. The study concludes that while a comprehensive 10-restaurant route serves as an excellent promotional tool, the more practical solution for tourists lies in smaller, themed alternative routes of 2-4 establishments. These curated clusters are more feasible, cater to diverse preferences, and effectively transform the province's culinary assets into accessible tourism products. The development of these routes provides a strategic framework for stimulating the local economy, strengthening cultural branding, and promoting sustainable food tourism in the region.

Recommendation

This study proposes both theoretical and practical recommendations for the further development of Udon Thani's food tourism. From a theoretical perspective, future research should analyze the economic and cultural impacts of the proposed routes, focusing on income distribution and effects on local lifestyles. This will help inform strategies to mitigate negative consequences and ensure the sustainable preservation of the local cultural and culinary identity.

For practical application, a multi-pronged approach is recommended. This includes creating online and print food trail maps, leveraging technologies like AI and AR to provide detailed restaurant information. Furthermore, social media campaigns, one-day tour packages, and community-based support are essential. This support should involve training local entrepreneurs and planning for improved facilities to enhance tourist convenience, a strategy supported by Somrak (2025). To ensure long-term sustainability, more in-depth research on tourist behavior, particularly their interest in local and healthy ingredients, is needed. The development of specific applications to link food culture with

tourism can also increase the route's value and appeal. To fund these initiatives, it is crucial to secure budgetary support from government agencies, as emphasized by Pholphirul et al. (2021) and Hemsuwan et al. (2024). These agencies should support the entire development process, from upstream product creation using local identities to downstream promotion, including organizing exhibitions and online public relations, to unlock the full potential of tourism and service entrepreneurs in the province.

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