

Gastronomy and coastal tourism: A symbiotic bond shaping tourist experiences in the La Serena-Coquimbo conurbation (Chile)

Gastronomía y turismo costero: Un vínculo simbiótico que configura las experiencias turísticas en la conurbación La Serena-Coquimbo (Chile)

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ABSTRACT

Coastal areas play a vital role in society, creating a favorable environment for a wide range of social, cultural and economic activities, including culinary recreational opportunities. This study analyzes the experiences of visitors to bars and restaurants on the coast of the conurbation of La Serena and Coquimbo, the fourth most populated metropolitan area in Chile and one of the main sun and beach tourist destinations in the country. The data, collected through a survey of 536 visitors, were analyzed using descriptive and multivariate statistical methods. It was revealed that tourists exhibit high satisfaction and loyalty, with key determining factors being the beauty of the establishments, the quality of the service and the gastronomic offer. In addition, it was found that the probability of satisfaction increases for frequent visitors to the area, women, people with lower incomes and with a post-secondary education, and those motivated to escape from routine or meet with family or friends. It is concluded that effectively managing the link between gastronomy and coastal tourism is crucial to position the area as a top-level tourist destination.

Keywords: Gastronomy, Coastline, Bars and restaurants, Tourist satisfaction, La Serena-Coquimbo Conurbation

RESUMEN

Las zonas costeras desempeñan un papel vital en la sociedad, creando un entorno favorable para una amplia gama de actividades sociales, culturales y económicas, incluidas oportunidades recreativas culinarias. Este estudio analiza las experiencias de los visitantes de bares y restaurantes en la costa de la conurbación de La Serena y Coquimbo, la cuarta área metropolitana más poblada de Chile y uno de los principales destinos turísticos de sol y playa del país. Los datos, recogidos mediante una encuesta a 536 visitantes, fueron analizados usando métodos estadísticos descriptivos y multivariados. Se reveló que los turistas exhiben alta satisfacción y lealtad, siendo factores determinantes clave la belleza de los establecimientos, la calidad del servicio y la oferta gastronómica. Además, se encontró que la probabilidad de satisfacción aumenta para los visitantes frecuentes de la zona, las mujeres, las personas de menores ingresos y con educación superior y aquellos motivados por escapar de la rutina o reunirse con familiares o amigos. Se concluye que gestionar eficazmente el vínculo entre gastronomía y turismo costero es crucial para posicionar la zona como un destino turístico de primer nivel.

Palabras clave: Gastronomía, Borde costero, Bares y restaurantes, Satisfacción del turista, Conurbación La Serena-Coquimbo

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, tourism has captured growing attention in academic literature, particularly in the realm of sun and beach tourism, which emerges as one of the most prominent sectors along the coasts of numerous countries worldwide (Carvache-Franco et al., 2018; Padilla et al., 2019). In this context, food has not only gained relevance as a fundamental element of tourism but has also established itself as an integral part of a destination's cultural heritage (Aydin, 2020).

With the growing recognition of gastronomy as an added value in tourist destinations, ensuring customer satisfaction with their culinary experience becomes an unavoidable priority (Kido et al., 2018), especially considering that it has become the main travel motivator in several tourist destinations (Tsai & Wang, 2017) and a distinctive feature in the marketing of a tourist attraction (Sio et al., 2024). Therefore, gastronomy constitutes a crucial element that influences the traveler's experience, satisfaction, and loyalty (Durmaz et al., 2022).

In the realm of culinary tourism, it is widely believed that the visitor's level of satisfaction with their culinary experience has a significant impact on the likelihood of their return and promotion of the establishments and sites they have visited (Ali et al., 2020; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017; Ji et al., 2016). Recent evidence has highlighted the importance of gastronomy as a valuable source of satisfaction for tourists in their destination (Erkmen, 2019; Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2020). This has led to a growing emphasis on food as a primary tourist offering to attract more visitors (Mohapatra & Nath Biswas, 2017; Yentür & Demir, 2022).

However, despite the recognized importance of gastronomy in the tourism experience, there is a general paucity of research on the implications of culinary tourism on destination image (Sio et al., 2024), and particularly, little is known about the visitor experience in these types of establishments. This becomes more critical when considering that in tourism studies, satisfaction becomes more complex when the research setting relates to tourists' food choices (Ji et al., 2016).

The La Serena-Coquimbo conurbation, located in the Coquimbo Region, Chile (See Figure 1), stands out as the main urban center in the North and the fourth largest ur-

ban agglomeration in Chile, with a population of 448,784 (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2019). These municipalities concentrate about 60% of the regional population and offer a wide range of services and facilities, playing a crucial role as a connection point between the northern region of the country and the capital. In addition, they have direct access to the ocean through the port of Coquimbo and are located relative proximity to Argentina via the Elqui Valley and the Agua Negra Pass (Castillo, 2022).

Figure 1. Map of the La Serena-Coquimbo Conurbation



Source: Adapted from educarchile (May 10, 2024).

The coastlines of La Serena and Coquimbo in Chile are a privileged tourist destination that blends the beauty of the sea with a diverse gastronomic offer. Stretching for approximately 40 kilometers, its coastline stands out as one of the main sun and beach tourist destinations in the country. The bars and restaurants in the area are essential elements of this experience, as they not only satisfy the palates of visitors but also form part of the local landscape and culture. These establishments offer a window into the region's identity, where the flavors of the sea merge with local culinary tradition, creating a unique sensory experience.

Within this context, the present study aims to analyze the visitor experience in the bars and restaurants along the coastline of La Serena and Coquimbo, Chile. The hypothesis is proposed that the service and quality of these establishments are determining factors in traveler satisfaction with the destination. Additionally, it is assumed that there are personal, behavioral, and motivational characteristics of visitors that affect their likelihood of satisfaction with the destination.

To achieve this objective, various aspects were examined, including the visitor profile, travel motivations, service and customer care, and interaction with the natural environment. It is expected that this research will contribute new knowledge to an area that has been largely unexplored until now: the tourist experience in bars and restaurants located on the Chilean coast. In addition, the results obtained could be used to improve the quality of gastronomic services offered in this area, benefiting both tourists and the local community. Finally, this study could contribute to a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between tourism, gastronomy, and the environment, thus promoting the sustainable development of the tourist destination.

The article is structured into four sections following this introduction. First, the research methodology employed in the study is detailed. Then, the main findings are summarized. Subsequently, the most relevant findings are discussed. Finally, the conclusions of the study are presented.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a quantitative approach, a non-experimental design, a descriptive type, and a cross-sectional scope. The study sample consisted of 536 subjects selected using a non-probability convenience sampling. The sample size was computed based on an infinite universe (N>100,000), a heterogeneity of 50%, a confidence level of 95%, and an approximate margin of error of 4.2%.

The data collection technique was a survey. The questionnaire was administered in person and online to visitors to the La Serena-Coquimbo coastal strip during the months of April and May 2023. The research addressed various questions related to the characteristics, behavior, motivation, preferences, satisfaction, and loyalty of visitors. The instrument consisted of polytomous questions about the respondent's profile (gender, age, education, etc.) and three 5-point Li-

kert-type scales on satisfaction and loyalty (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), motivations for the visit (1=not at all important to 5=very important), and satisfaction attributes (1=not at all important to 5=very important).

The data were analyzed using frequency tables and graphs (absolute and relative), measures of central tendency and dispersion, and association tests for categorical variables (chi-square test). Additionally, the reliability of the instrument's scale (Likert) was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded satisfactory results ($\alpha > .7$) for both the motivation scale ($\alpha = .8$), the attribute rating scale ($\alpha = .89$) and the satisfaction scale applied ($\alpha = .96$).

Finally, a multivariate analysis was conducted using binary logistic regression to identify the variables (tourist characteristics, visit motivations, and establishment attributes) that increase the likelihood of visitor satisfaction with the coastal strip's bars and restaurants. This technique is employed in situations where the probability of occurrence of a dichotomous dependent variable needs to be explained through a set of predictor variables of different nature. The applied model established visitor satisfaction as the dependent variable. The mathematical equation used was as follows:

$$\hat{p}_i = \left(\frac{e^{\hat{b}_0 + \hat{b}_1 x_{1i} + \hat{b}_2 x_{2i} + \dots + \hat{b}_k x_{ki}}}{1 + e^{\hat{b}_0 + \hat{b}_1 x_{1i} + \hat{b}_2 x_{2i} + \dots + \hat{b}_k x_{ki}}} \right) \quad (1)$$

In the formula, pi represents the probability that the i-th individual is satisfied. The explanatory variables of the model (dichotomous) correspond to six tourist profile variables (gender, age, education, city of residence, income, and occupation), seven behavioral variables (frequency of visit, number of visits, type of companion, number of companions, use of Instagram, spending level, and information source), nine motivational variables (novelty, disconnection, economics, gastronomy, tourist reputation, meeting with family/friends, events, geographic proximity, and business), and nine value attributes (beauty of the place, quality of gastronomy, conservation of the coastal area, quality of service, value for money, care and cleanliness of the area, citizen safety, complementary events offering, and access to parking).

It should be noted that the Likert scale scores were dichotomized into "essential" and "non-essential," where the values of strongly agree (5) are equivalent to "essential"

(coded as 1) and any other value is equivalent to "non-essential" (coded as 0). Additionally, the respondents' profile variables were incorporated to complement the analysis, with the specific coding presented in the results table.

All statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics and Minitab software.

RESULTS

Visitor profile

The majority of the respondents are female (55%), are between the ages of 18 and 39 (74%), hold a technical or university degree (57%), have an income of less than USD 1335 (53%), are employed (47%), and reside in the city of La Serena (60%). See Table 1.

Table 1. Visitor sociodemographic characteristics

Variable	Segment	%
Gender	Male	42.2
	Female	55.4
	Other	2.4
Age	18-29 years old	54.7
	30-39 years old	19.8
	40-49 years old	13.6
	50-59 years old	8.2
	60 years or older	3.7
Income level	Less than USD 445	16.0
	USD 445 to USD 890	22.9
	USD 890 to USD 1335	13.6
	USD 1335 to USD 2225	10.3
	USD 2225 or more	7.1
	No income	30.0
City of residence	Coquimbo	27.1
	La Serena	59.9
	Other	13.1
Education level	Primary	2.4
	High school	37.5
	Technical or Professional	31.9
	University degree	25.4
	Postgraduate	2.8
Occupation or profession	Student	39.2
	Worker	46.5
	Homeowner	7.1
	Business owner	3.5
	Other	3.7

Source: Author's own survey data.

Table 2 shows that the majority of patrons at bars and restaurants along the La Serena and Coquimbo coastline visit monthly (43%), every two month (15%), or weekly (15%). On average, each visitor spends between USD 11 and USD 56 (84%), with an average expenditure of USD 54. Notably, around half of the respondents spent less than USD 26 on their last visit to an establishment in the area.

Regarding the traveler's companions, visitors often frequent these establishments with family members (37%), friends (36%), or couples (23%). Visits typically involve groups of 4 people (29%), 3 people (23%), or 5 or more people (24%).

When it comes to information sources, most tourists rely on recommendations from friends or family (42%), followed by social media reviews (31%) and previous experience (16%). In contrast, traditional media outlets like television, radio, and newspapers were not utilized at all (1%). Additionally, visitors highlighted their preference for various digital platforms to gather information (81%), with Instagram being the most popular (61%), followed by online search engines (11%) and Facebook (8%). However, 19% indicated that they don't use any internet sources for information.

Table 2. Guest Behavior

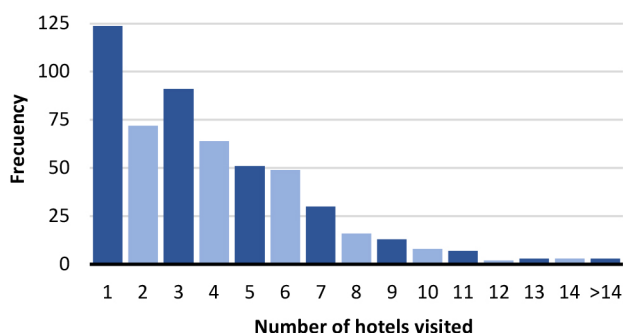
Variable	Segment	%
Visit frequency	More than once a week	2.6
	Once a week	15.1
	Once a month	42.5
	Every two months	15.3
	Every three months	8.2
	Twice a year or less	16.2
Spending per visit (per person)	Less than USD 11	4.1
	USD 11 to USD 22	41.2
	USD 22 to USD 56	42.4
	USD 56 to USD 111	10.1
Preferred Platform	USD 111 or more	2.2
	Instagram	55.8
	WhatsApp	22.4
	Facebook	11.8
	TikTok	4.7
Information source	Twitter	2.1
	Other	3.4
	Friends or family	42.4
	Social media	30.6
	Previous experience	16.4

	Internet information	4.1
	Other	1.5
	None	5.0
Type of companion	Alone	2.2
	Family	36.9
	Friends	35.8
	Couple	22.8
	Colleagues	2.2
	Number of companions	0
1		8.6
2		12.7
3		23.3
4		29.3
5 or more		24.3

Source: Author's own survey data.

Tourists were also asked about the number bars and restaurants along the La Serena and Coquimbo coastline they had visited, revealing that most had frequented at least three establishments. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Total number of establishments visited



Source: Author's own survey data.

The application of the chi-square independence test between behavioral variables and visitor sociodemographic characteristics revealed several statistically significant associations of interest.

First, it was found that the visitor's spending level is dependent on age ($p < .001$) and socioeconomic aspects such as education ($p < .001$), occupation or profession ($p < .001$), and income ($p < .001$). It was observed that adults between the ages of 30 and 49, with higher education (undergraduate or postgraduate), who work as entrepreneurs or professionals (dependent or independent) and have high incomes, are the ones who spend the most.

Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between the type of travel companion and the traveler's age ($p = .013$) and income level ($p < .001$). In terms of age, it was observed that younger travelers (under 30 years old) tend to travel with friends, while middle-aged adults (over 40 years old) prefer to travel with family, and older adults (60 years old or older) opt to travel with their couple or alone. In terms of income, those with higher incomes (USD 2225 or more) tend to travel with family and partner, while those with lower incomes (less than USD 1335) are more likely to travel with friends or alone.

Finally, it was observed that information resource preferences vary significantly based on the visitor's age ($p < .001$). The Instagram platform is preferred by younger individuals (under 40 years old), while Facebook and online search engines are generally more widely used by those aged 40 and over.

Motivations to visit the coastline

The main motivations for visiting the La Serena and Coquimbo coastline are meeting with family or friends (84%), breaking away from routine (76%), savoring the gastronomy (63%), enjoying affordable dining establishments (61%), and capitalizing on the tourism reputation of the area (58%). See Table 3.

The analysis of independence tests between visitor motivations and profiles revealed several statistically significant associations, detailed in Table 3. Specifically, it is noteworthy that women are more inclined to visit the area due to their desire to explore new dining sites and their affordability pricing. Furthermore, it is observed that younger individuals exhibit a heightened interest in discovering novel establishments, whereas adults aged 30 to 59 do so due to their proximity to their residences. Moreover, individuals with lower incomes and those possessing university, technical, or professional education are motivated to visit more economical establishments. Conversely, both women and people with lower incomes are the most motivated groups to visit the area to participate in scheduled events. Finally, it is adults in the 30 to 60 age range, along with those with high incomes (over USD 1335), who primarily travel for business purposes.

Table 3. Motivations to visit the La Serena and Coquimbo Coastline (%)

Motivations	1	2	3	4	5	Gender	Chi-Square Test (p)		
							Age	Education	Income
Discover new dining establishments	5.0	9.3	31.5	32.5	21.6	.044*	.032*	.362	.366
Break away from the routine	3.0	4.1	17.2	38.2	37.5	.077	.511	.191	.832
Enjoy affordable dining establishments	4.7	6.3	27.6	35.8	25.6	.028*	.202	.004**	.001**
Taste the gastronomy	3.0	7.5	26.9	33.8	28.9	.274	.204	.631	.314
Capitalize on tourism reputation area	6.9	8.0	27.4	35.1	22.6	.415	.641	.364	.082
Convene with family or friends	1.9	3.4	10.4	34.5	49.8	.617	.208	.554	.271
Attend scheduled events	20.5	19.2	27.2	20.3	12.7	.008**	.068	.591	.025*
Enjoy the proximity to my home	18.7	15.7	26.9	22.9	15.9	.784	.024*	.392	.000***
Conduct business	53.9	17.4	13.1	9.1	6.5	.260	.019*	.061	.000***

Source: Author's own survey data.

Note: Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each motivation when taking a tourist trip. The importance levels are measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = not very important, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important). Significance level: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Valued attributes of bars and restaurants

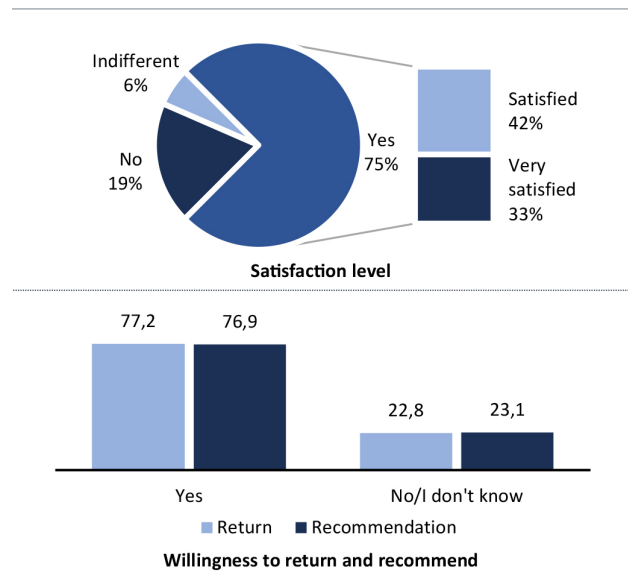
The most valued attributes of bars and restaurants along the La Serena-Coquimbo coastline are primarily: the beauty and decoration of the establishments (82%), the attention and quality of service offered (80%), and the diversity and quality of the cuisine (79%). Conversely, the least valued attributes are parking access (40%), complementary event offerings (48%), and public safety (48%).

The examination of attribute ratings according to visitor profiles revealed several statistically significant associations, detailed in Table 4. Particularly noteworthy is that younger visitors (under 40 years old) place special value on the cleanliness and upkeep of the area. Similarly, those with lower educational levels (without college degrees) tend to appreciate the diversity and quality of local gastronomy more. Furthermore, it was observed that public safety and parking accessibility are more highly valued by individuals with lower levels of education.

Visitor satisfaction and loyalty level

The majority of visitors to bars and restaurants along the coastline report satisfaction with the service received (75%). The results indicate that 1 out of 3 people are completely satisfied, while only 2 out of 10 express dissatisfactions. Additionally, visitor loyalty was analyzed in terms of their willingness to return and recommend establishments in the area. The results were favorable, as the majority expressed their intention to return to the last visited venue (77%) and to recommend establishments in the conurbation (77%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Visitor satisfaction and loyalty level



Source: Author's own survey data.

The analysis of the relationship between visitor satisfaction level and sociodemographic characteristics revealed only one statistically significant association with income level (p=.004). Particularly, it was observed that satisfaction decreases as visitor income increases. For instance, when grouping income levels into three increasing categories - less than USD 890, between USD 890 and USD 2225, and USD 2225 or more - satisfaction levels are 77%, 75%, and 70%, respectively. These results suggest that visitors with lower incomes tend to be more satisfied with their experience than those with higher incomes.

Table 4. Customer-Preferred Coastal Bar and Restaurant Attributes (%)

Attribute	1	2	3	4	5	Chi-Square Test (p)			
						Gender	Age	Education	Income
Beauty/decoration	1.1	1.1	16.0	49.1	32.6	.700	.639	.064	.768
Diversity and quality of gastronomy	0.6	2.2	18.1	45.3	33.8	.320	.734	.035*	.144
Conservation of the coastal area	1.5	6.5	27.8	41.0	23.1	.068	.096	.237	.046*
Attention and quality of establishments	0.9	2.8	16.6	48.7	31.0	.094	.886	.193	.608
Quality-price ratio of establishments	1.9	4.5	28.9	45.3	19.4	.145	.543	.172	.813
Care and cleanliness of the area	1.5	4.5	26.9	42.5	24.6	.768	.011*	.565	.253
Public safety	5.4	11.4	34.9	33.0	15.3	.095	.172	.034*	.149
Complementary event offerings	6.9	8.8	36.4	34.1	13.8	.355	.093	.338	.744
Parking access	13.1	15.7	31.0	23.7	16.6	.117	.238	.033*	.500

Source: Author's own survey data.

Note: Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each motivation when taking a tourist trip. The importance levels are measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = not very important, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important). Significance level: *p<.05.

Visitor satisfaction estimation model

The results presented in Table 5 reveal multiple personal characteristics and motivations, as well as place attributes that influence visitor satisfaction along the coastline of the conurbation.

The findings indicate that bars and restaurants which effectively highlight and communicate elements such as service quality (p<.001) and the beauty of their facilities (p<.01) are the ones that generate higher levels of satisfaction. Additionally, these places seem to especially satisfy those seeking to disconnect from routine (p<.001) and spend time with family and friends (p<.1).

Regarding tourists' profiles, it's notable that individuals who tend to experience higher satisfaction with coastal establishments are typically female (p<.05), have higher education levels (p<.05), lower incomes (p<.1), have visited multiple venues (p<.05), and are regular patrons of the area (p<.05). Conversely, those who are employed (p<.05) and primarily use Instagram as their main social media platform (p<.01) tend to report lower levels of satisfaction. Particularly, the results reveal that the likelihood of satisfaction increases when the visitor has higher education (1.8 times more), is female (1.8 times more), has a monthly income below USD 445 (1.7 times more), is a frequent diner (3.8 times more), and has visited more than two venues in the area (1.6 times more). Additionally, it's observed that the likelihood of satisfaction increases when the visitor's main motivations are escaping routine (2.8 times more)

and/or spending time with loved ones (1.8 times more). Similarly, customer satisfaction is significantly boosted by the quality of service offered (6.6 times more) and the attractive decoration of their facilities (2 times more).

Finally, it's worth noting that the selected final model achieved an adjustment of 38.5%, according to the Nagelkerke's R-squared coefficient, and was considered adequate based on the results of the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test (p= .704). The overall percentage of correct predictions by the model was 78%.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive insight into the profile, preferences, and experiences of visitors to bars and restaurants along the coastline of La Serena-Coquimbo. These findings are particularly relevant for understanding the tourism and gastronomic dynamics of this coastal region, as well as similar sun and beach destinations.

Firstly, a predominant visitor profile stands out: a young individual (under 40 years old), professional, residing in La Serena, with moderate income, and a strong female presence (Araya-Pizarro & Álvarez Cortés, 2020). These characteristics suggest a target audience with specific influences that may affect their preferences and behaviors during their visit to these establishments.

Table 5. Predictors of visitor satisfaction with bars and restaurants

Variables	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for Exp(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Gender (female=1)	0.582	6.427	.011**	1.790	1.141	2.807
Education (graduate/postgraduate=1)	0.579	5.442	.020**	1.785	1.097	2.905
Occupation (worker=0)	0.751	6.652	.010**	2.118	1.197	3.747
Income (Less than USD 445=1)	0.544	3.679	.055*	1.723	0.988	3.006
Social media (Instagram=0)	0.695	8.573	.003***	2.004	1.258	3.192
Visits per week (more than one=1)	1.335	4.162	.041**	3.798	1.054	13.689
Establishments visited (more than two=1)	0.479	3.938	.047**	1.614	1.006	2.589
Motivation 1 (break away from the routine=1)	1.045	18.116	.000***	2.844	1.758	4.602
Motivation 2 (convene with family/friends=1)	0.444	3.313	.069*	1.559	0.966	2.516
Attribute 1 (facility decoration=1)	0.674	7.438	.006***	1.961	1.209	3.182
Attribute 2 (service quality=1)	1.886	53.765	.000***	6.596	3.984	10.921
Constant	-4.437	78.102	.000***	0.012		
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	.704					
Cox & Snell R Square	.277					
Nagelkerke R Square	.385					
Global Percentage	.780					

Source: Author's own survey data.

Note: Significance level *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .01.

The analysis of visitor behavior unveils significant patterns. Overall, it's been observed that users spend an average of \$54 per visit, frequenting establishments monthly and typically attending with friends or family in groups of 4 or 5 individuals. This information proves valuable for owners and managers when crafting strategies to attract and retain various customer segments.

The influence of personal recommendations and the use of digital platforms to obtain information about establishments in the area highlights the importance of word of mouth and social media in visitors' decisions, especially Instagram (Mattei, 2024). It is proven that social networks can influence both the development of gastronomy and tourism itself (Vukolic et al., 2022). Additionally, the relationship between the visitor's age and their online search preferences underscores the importance of strengthening the online presence of the sector and adopting social media strategies to improve interaction with potential visitors. These digital marketing initiatives can drive market engagement and increase business competitiveness (Kelson et al., 2024).

The results of the association tests between behavioral and sociodemographic variables of tourists offer valuable insights into consumption patterns and preferences in the context of coastal tourism. Findings indicate that visitors'

spending levels are closely linked to factors such as age, education, employment status, and income (Orden-Mejía & Moreno-Manzo, 2024; Phan et al., 2024). It is confirmed that adults (aged 30 to 49), with higher education and high incomes, are the ones who spend the most during their visit to coastal venues. This trend may be related to their purchasing power and willingness to invest in leisure and entertainment experiences.

The influence of age and income is also reflected in companion preferences during visits. Adults under 30 and those with lower incomes tend to prefer the company of friends, while adults over 40 and visitors with higher incomes opt to go out with family members. In this context, there are studies highlighting how travel companions influence the selection of gastronomic preferences (Liu et al., 2021). Similarly, the preference for certain information resources exhibits an age-related trend. The Instagram platform is predominantly used by younger people, while Facebook and online search engines are more popular among those aged 40 or older. These findings suggest that motivations and social dynamics vary according to life stages, which may have important implications for designing effective communication strategies (advertising and promotion) targeted at different sociodemographic groups.

The examination of tourists' motivations reveals that the

coastal shoreline of the La Serena-Coquimbo conurbation is positioned as an ideal tourist destination for family outings, where visitors can disconnect from their routine and enjoy local gastronomy at affordable prices, in an area renowned for its fame and prestige. In this regard, statistical association tests revealed that the desire to explore new bars and restaurants is influenced by both gender and age. It is interesting to note that women and younger individuals show a greater inclination to explore new establishments, while men and older individuals are more averse to novelty. In this context, studies verify the significant influence of neophilic (preference for the new) and neophobic (aversion to the unknown) tendencies on tourists' acceptance of local cuisine (Baah et al., 2019).

On the other hand, it was found that the search for budget-friendly establishments is closely related to gender, education, and income. Women show a greater tendency to enjoy places with more accessible prices, which may reflect an economic sensitivity and a search for value in their consumption decisions. Additionally, the results indicate that those with undergraduate studies (technical, professional, and university degrees) and those with lower incomes also prefer more economical establishments, suggesting financial awareness and adaptation to their available resources. It is worth mentioning that the higher sensitivity of women towards price has already been confirmed in other tourism areas such as hospitality (Herjanto et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2020).

The high satisfaction and loyalty reported by the majority of visitors reflect the perceived quality of the gastronomic experience on the coast of the conurbation. However, it is important to highlight the discrepancies found in income levels. It is observed that as the visitor's income increases, the level of satisfaction tends to decrease. This pattern suggests that those with higher incomes may have higher expectations or be more critical in their evaluation of the tourism experience. Conversely, those with lower incomes may be more inclined to feel satisfied with an experience that fits their expectations and budget. In this regard, studies have found that travelers with higher incomes approach the tourism experience with a more critical focus (Akinici & Aksoy, 2019; Torres-Sovero et al., 2012). This underscores the importance of understanding the diverse expectations of the population and offering high-quality experiences that can meet the expectations of visitors, regardless of their income level.

The findings suggest that visitors primarily value the am-

biance of establishments, the service provided, and the quality of the gastronomy (Araya-Pizarro & Álvarez Cortés, 2020; Bertan, 2020). In the realm of dining, it is recognized that the perception of food, service, and physical environment positively influences diner satisfaction (Bae et al., 2018), which also relates to customer retention (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). From this perspective, it is worth emphasizing that gastronomic identity is considered a strategic resource for destinations, as food consumption influences identity, culinary heritage, and collective memory (Mariano-Juárez et al., 2023). Therefore, developing a destination differentiation strategy focused on presenting distinctive gastronomic products would be crucial for success and competitiveness in the tourism market (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

On the other hand, the least valued attributes, such as parking access, complementary event offerings, and public safety, suggest areas for improvement for establishments in the region. This could involve implementing strategies to address these concerns and enrich the overall visitor experience. At this juncture, it is crucial to highlight the role of safety in tourism, recognized as an essential element in tourists' destination choices (Wendt & Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2024).

The predictive model identified several factors that significantly influence the likelihood of satisfaction among visitors to bars and restaurants in the studied area. Firstly, it was found that visitors with higher levels of education have a significantly greater probability of experiencing satisfaction. This suggests that education may influence customers' expectations and perceptions, as well as their ability to appreciate and evaluate the gastronomic experience.

Furthermore, the research revealed that the female gender is associated with a higher likelihood of satisfaction. This difference may be related to discrepancies in preferences, expectations, or individual experiences during visits to gastronomic establishments.

The relationship between monthly income and satisfaction is also noteworthy, as visitors with lower incomes have a significantly higher probability of being satisfied. This could suggest that visitors with lower incomes may be more sensitive to perceived value and be more satisfied with experiences that fit within their budget.

Another important finding is the influence of visitor beha-

rior on their satisfaction. It was found that frequent diners and those who have visited more than two establishments in the area have a much higher probability of being satisfied. This suggests that familiarity with the area and previous experience can positively contribute to customer satisfaction.

Additionally, visitor motivations play a significant role in their satisfaction. Specifically, those seeking to brake away from routine or gather with loved ones have a much higher likelihood of being satisfied. These findings highlight the importance of understanding customers' underlying motivations to design gastronomic experiences that meet their emotional and social needs.

Finally, it is confirmed that service quality and the aesthetics of the facilities are critical factors in increasing customer satisfaction. Establishments that excel in these aspects have a significantly higher probability of satisfying their customers, highlighting the importance of investing in staff training and the design and upkeep of attractive spaces. In this regard, food can add value to the tourist experience, especially to travelers seeking unique experiences. Thus, the perception of authenticity in a restaurant has a positive impact on satisfaction and the intention to return to a destination (DiPietro & Levitt, 2017).

Together, these findings provide valuable insights for stakeholders involved in the management and promotion of the gastronomic and tourism offerings on the coast of La Serena and Coquimbo, highlighting key areas for future research and the development of improvement strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to analyze visitors' experiences at bars and restaurants along the coastline of La Serena and Coquimbo. Several conclusions were drawn from the results, highlighting the complexity of visitors' behaviors and preferences in this area. This has significant implications for designing strategies to develop and promote sun and beach tourist destinations.

A specific target audience with distinct socio-demographic, behavioral, and motivational characteristics that influence their preferences and actions during their visits to gastronomic establishments has been identified. The traveler profile comprises young adult females who are actively employed, residing in La Serena city, with moderate

monthly incomes. Behavior-wise, they visit monthly, often with close companions, with an average expenditure of \$54 per visit. They utilize digital platforms, particularly Instagram, for information and heavily rely on recommendations from friends and family. The main reasons for visiting establishments in the area notably include the importance of gastronomic quality and affordable prices.

High levels of satisfaction, coupled with the willingness to revisit and recommend the area, indicate its positive potential. Visitors appreciate aspects such as the beauty and decoration of the establishment, the attention and quality of service, and the diversity and quality of the gastronomy. However, areas for improvement are identified in aspects such as parking access, the complementary offering of events, and public safety.

The likelihood of satisfaction increases for visitors with higher education levels, female gender, lower monthly income, frequent visitation, and motivations to disconnect from routine or meet with loved ones. Additionally, the beauty of the venues, the quality of service, and the gastronomic offering are also associated with higher satisfaction.

Based on these findings, the study provides specific improvement opportunities for the development of the coastal area of the La Serena-Coquimbo conurbation: 1) Targeting young professional women as a focal segment, 2) Strengthening online presence and encouraging the use of social media, particularly Instagram, 3) Tailoring communication strategies to different age groups, 4) Providing a wide variety of gastronomic options at affordable prices, 5) Creating suitable spaces and activities for family groups, 6) Improving parking access, event offerings, and public safety, and 7) Enhancing attention and service quality, as well as the beauty and decoration of the establishments.

Finally, based on the limitations of the research, it is suggested to replicate the study in different seasons of the year to confirm or identify possible disparities among the different types of visitors to the coastal area of the La Serena-Coquimbo conurbation. Additionally, given the findings obtained, it would be interesting to delve deeper into the analysis of the attributes of food and the culinary experience that influence the preferences of visitors to the sector. In this regard, it is considered relevant to use a stratified sampling approach focused on the highlighted characteristics of the socio-demographic and motivational profile of the visitors.

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