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# On considering Australia: exploring Indonesian restaurants in promoting ethnic foods as an instrument of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy

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## Abstract

Food is said to be ethnic, when it comes from diverse regions that have crossed international borders. Ethnic food has the ability to contribute to the growth, promotion, and strengthening of intercultural connections. Recently, Indonesia has launched a gastrodiplomacy strategy, named 'Indonesia Spice Up the World' (ISUTW). ISUTW aims to increase spice exports to USD 2 billion by 2024 and present Indonesian ethnic foods toward the establishment of 4,000 Indonesian restaurants abroad. Australia as one of the closest neighbor countries is considered to be a strategic target nation. This study serves a dual purpose: first, to investigate the state of culinary traditions embraced by the Indonesian business owners working in culinary business in Australia and, second, to recognize the role of Indonesian diasporas, including students, who also partake in introducing distinctive Indonesian ethnic foods to both native Australians and fellow Indonesian residents in Australia. In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, which encompassed surveys, literature reviews, and focus group discussions. The findings of this study, such as Indonesian culinary business patterns and consumer behaviors in Australia, offer recommendations for the governments of Indonesia and Australia to maintain favorable diplomatic relations by means of promoting Indonesian ethnic foods, in this context called as gastrodiplomacy attempts.

**Keywords** Australia, Ethnic food, Gastrodiplomacy, Indonesian diaspora, Indonesia Spice up the World

## Introduction

As an archipelagic country comprising over 17,000 islands, Indonesia stands as the homeland for nearly 300 distinct ethnic groups. The ethnic diversity bestows upon

the nation, profoundly influencing various aspects of culture, traditions, indigenous cuisine, and dietary habits. Consequently, each ethnic group exhibits a unique and individualistic food tradition, replete with fascinating narratives that chronicle the origins and significance of their culinary creations. These food traditions encompass the inherent stories behind the dishes, insights into their nutritional merits, and the intricate interplay of food-related customs and consumption patterns within their communities [1, 2].

Indonesia has been renowned for the 'mother of spices' due to its abundance of native spices, useful for flavoring food and enhancing its taste. Such recognition is closely related to the Age of Exploration. Historically, the

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location of Spice Islands, which are today known as the Maluku Islands in Southeast Asia, is an important aspect in comprehending the Age of Exploration. The Age of Exploration, also known as the Age of Discovery, started at the beginning of the fifteenth century and lasted until the early seventeenth century. During this period, Europeans began exploring the world by sea, in search of new commercial routes, wealth, and knowledge. One of the most compelling reasons for exploration, however, was the search for a new route for the spice and silk trades in Asia. Pepper, clove, and mace were lucrative spice products in the global trade. The Age of Exploration thus demonstrated the high profitability of spices as commercial products.

Some of the remains of spice plantations can still be found across Indonesia, although their existence is a far cry from their glorious heyday in the past. In 2021, Indonesia produced more than 600,000 tons of spices and medicinal plants. The provinces of East, Central, and West Java produce the maximum amount of turmeric, ginger, galangal, zingiber zerumbet, and curcuma. Bangka Belitung (34,433 tons) and Lampung (14,698 tons) are the largest producers of white pepper. Meanwhile, cloves and nutmeg make a greater contribution to the regional incomes of Maluku (20,454 tons) and North Sulawesi (11,366 tons) provinces, respectively [3, 4].

Meanwhile, Indonesia's spice legacy has not been fully harnessed to support her contemporary development, which requires a strengthening of national identity, nation branding, and economic opportunities. Ethnic foods, which make prolific use of spices to enhance flavor and authentic taste, have not yet succeeded in increasing the popularity of Indonesian cuisine. In addition, the existence of Indonesian restaurants overseas, which arguably have significant promotional potential, is still at a rudimentary level. According to a survey conducted by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Diplomacy Directorate in 2021, the numbers of overseas Indonesian restaurants are more than 1,100 [5]. The relatively lower number of Indonesian overseas restaurants compared to other Southeast Asian counterparts can be attributed to the absence of a comprehensive strategy for promoting Indonesian cuisine abroad. Furthermore, if any, the existing strategies have been subject to frequent changes due to shifts in leadership within the Indonesian tourism and creative economy sectors. For instance, Thailand has more than 20,000 restaurants in foreign countries [6]. As a response, the Indonesian government has designed specific strategies to attract target markets. Such initiatives would involve not only government agencies, but also private actors and other key stakeholders, such as food entrepreneurs and restaurateurs in the Indonesian culinary business.

Since 2020, the Indonesian government, through the Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs, has been systematically including several goals within the framework of a national action plan for Indonesia's food and spices strategy. This action plan has been named as 'Indonesia Spice Up the World' (ISUTW). However, this is not the first such action plan. Prior to the formulation of ISUTW, Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism (later renamed the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in 2019) had initiated a collaboration with 100 restaurants founded by Indonesian diasporas, constituting the first step in branding Indonesia through restaurants [7]. This initiative was titled 'The Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding Program'.

The ISUTW national action plan was unveiled on November 4, 2021, in conjunction with Indonesia's Day at the Expo 2020 in Dubai. It is a government-led national strategic initiative to generate economic value through tourism, commerce, and investment in the gastronomic industry that collaborates with various stakeholders including governments, academics, businesses, communities, associations, and the media [8]. ISUTW aims to increase spice exports to USD 2 billion by 2024 and present 4,000 Indonesian restaurants abroad [9].

Conceptually, ISUTW is part of Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy strategy to win the hearts and minds of an international audience. Through "soft power" [a term used in International Relations to enhance a country's cultural influence and make it commensurate with economic, political, and military weight [10]], this endeavor aims to improve Indonesia's nation-brand position, economic growth, and financial investment, in the future. Rockower [11, 12] defines gastrodiplomacy as a public diplomacy campaign undertaken by a national government, which combines culinary and cultural diplomacy to elevate its nation's brand.

For the ISUTW campaigns, the Indonesian government initially selected Australia and Africa as its target countries, but as things progressed, the emphasis shifted to exploring all potential on other continents or in other countries rather than focusing on those two [13]. This study argues that Australia as a country and the Indonesian diaspora's culinary business experiences in Australia should be investigated to identify potential for enhancing the ISUTW goals. The number of Indonesian-born people or Indonesian diasporas in Australia stood at approximately 89,480 at the end of June 2021 [14]. Most of them reside permanently in Australia, for employment or education. Given their sense of belongingness to their homelands and their desires to earn a living, several Indonesian diasporas established restaurants and opened home catering businesses in Australia. The Indonesian Embassy in Canberra identified approximately 140

Indonesian restaurants in eight states and two territories in Australia [15]. Nevertheless, a recent survey conducted by the Public Diplomacy Directorate, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 2021 recorded as many as 151 Indonesian restaurants in Australia [5]. Despite a large number of Indonesian restaurants in Australia, academic research on ethnic food and diplomacy in relation to Indonesian food and restaurants in Australia still receives little attention. Most researchers have identified and discussed Chinese, Korean, Thai, Japanese, and other Asian nations, Portuguese, and Greek foods in foreign restaurants in Australia [16–21].

This study serves a dual purpose: first, to investigate the state of culinary traditions embraced by the Indonesian business owners working in culinary business in Australia and, second, to recognize the role of Indonesian diasporas, including students, who also partake in introducing distinctive Indonesian ethnic foods to both native Australians and fellow Indonesian residents in Australia. Significantly, the findings of this study can offer recommendations for the governments of Indonesia and Australia to maintain favorable diplomatic relations by means of promoting Indonesian ethnic foods, in this context called as gastrodiplomacy attempts.

## Method

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, which encompassed surveys, literature reviews, and focus group discussions. This approach used keywords related to the research variables to enhance the conceptual and theoretical underpinning of the study and triangulate empirical data to support and expand the research findings [22].

Prior to conducting an online survey, several steps were taken to create a structured questionnaire. Initially, the authors gathered information from academic papers, government documents, and regulations. This information included the history of Indonesia's ethnic cuisine and its potential for promotion as a culinary business and a diplomatic tool between the two countries. Subsequently, a research team engaged experts in gastrodiplomacy from Australia and Indonesia, including a government official from the Indonesian Embassy in Australia, a professional chef, and leaders of restaurant associations. Valuable insights were obtained from the proprietors of Shalom and Ubud Restaurants, one of whom serves on the board of the Indonesian Restaurant Association (IRA) in Sydney. The contributions of Rara de' Kitchen (Melbourne), Mammo Kitchen (Canberra), and a professional chef from "Dapur Bali" in Brisbane during online focus group discussions were also highly significant. All of these processes served as inspiration for designing the

questionnaire for both producers and consumers of Indonesian ethnic cuisine in Australia.

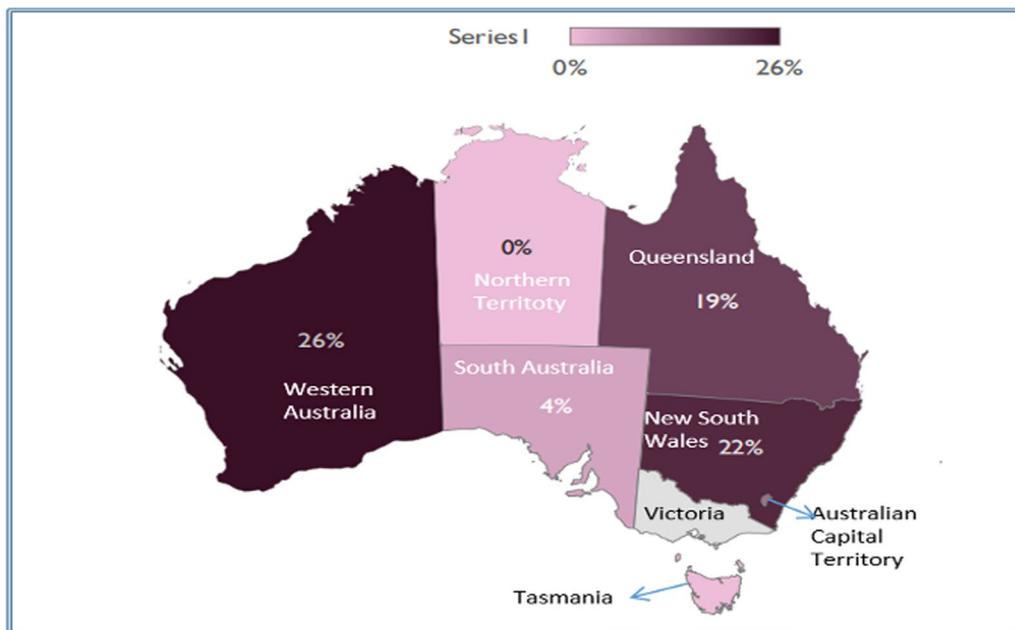
The survey comprised two distinct stages. The initial phase sought responses from cafe, restaurant, and catering establishment proprietors across Australia. The subsequent phase of the survey aimed to gauge the perspectives of consumers who Indonesian diasporas including students regarding these businesses. The online survey was administered during the periods of September 8 to October 8, 2021, and October 8 to November 8, 2021, respectively. The online survey served as an exploratory tool to gather preliminary data on the Indonesian restaurant business in Australia, identifying and mapping initial knowledge in the country. Despite certain constraints, such as reduced response rates when compared to conventional survey methods, online surveys have become increasingly popular as a qualitative research instrument, particularly during the social mobility restriction [23–28]. By utilizing the Survey Monkey platform to distribute this questionnaire to 27 business owners and 100 members of the Indonesian diaspora in Australia (see Additional File 1), it was anticipated that the outcomes of this survey would produce responses of a similar nature and quality to those obtained through traditional paper-based surveys [23].

Regarding the sampling methods, a purposive sampling technique with a snowball approach was employed. It is worth noting that there are approximately 151 Indonesian restaurants in Australia [5] and these figures were regarded as the study's population. This research was conducted during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the sample size was limited, and researchers could not access an up-to-date list of these businesses. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the questionnaire across eight states.

Moreover, the data underwent examination through descriptive statistics. This analytical process was extended to condense and exhibit information with the aim of generating hypotheses. These techniques served to offer a comprehensive view of the data and facilitate the recognition of patterns and associations. Data were also visually represented through graphs, maps, plots, and charts. The result section predominantly features frequency distributions and summary statistics. Through this informative approach, it becomes more convenient to comprehend the Indonesian culinary industry in Australia from both the vantage points of business owners and consumers.

## Characteristics of Indonesian ethnic foods and how it becomes a treasure for Indonesian gastrodiplomacy

Indonesian traditional ethnic foods are a fascinating fusion of historical, traditional, and cultural influences



**Fig. 1** Distribution of respondents. In the two surveys that were administered, a majority of the participants were found to be residing in Western Australia, comprising approximately 26% of the total respondents. The proportion of respondents from New South Wales, which includes the Australian Capital Territory of Canberra, was found to be 22%, whereas respondents from Queensland constituted just 19% of the total. The surveys conducted in South Australia and Northern Australia had the lowest participation rates, with only 4% and no respondents, respectively. Out of the total sample size of 127 participants, the acceptance rate was approximately 71%. Specifically, there were 17 respondents who identified as business owners, while the 70 respondents consisted of Indonesian diasporas, including students. Source: Authors, 2021

that have evolved over centuries, shaped by the country's geographical and climatic backdrop [29]. The country's cuisine reflects Indonesia's colorful history of trade, conquest, and migration, which has contributed to the vibrant assortment of flavors, ingredients, and cooking techniques found in its various regional dishes.

The remarkable diversity of traditional Indonesian cuisine is evident from the extensive culinary delights identified across the archipelago. In several scholarly publications, such as *Mustika Rasa*, published in the 1960s, it presents approximately 1600 distinct culinary offerings [30]. Meanwhile, Murdijati Gardjito's research adds another dimension to this culinary tapestry, identifying a remarkable 3,259 types of culinary [31]. This wealth of culinary heritage is a testament to the cultural and regional variations that have evolved over centuries.

On the other hand, the historical context plays a crucial role in shaping Indonesian traditional ethnic cuisine. Indonesia's strategic location along ancient trade routes, such as the famed Spice Route, attracted traders from China, India, the Middle East, and Europe. These interactions facilitated the exchange of spices, herbs, and cooking methods that eventually blended with authentic ingredients and techniques. Moreover, Indonesia's history of colonization by various European powers, including the Dutch and Portuguese, left a lasting impact on its

cuisine [29]. The Dutch colonization, in particular, introduced ingredients like potatoes and tomatoes, which became integral elements in dishes like *Gado-gado*, a vegetable salad served with peanut sauce. This historical interplay of cultures resonates in modern Indonesian cuisine, highlighting the nation's openness to assimilating new flavors while retaining its authentic roots. Moreover, the introduction of new cooking techniques, such as frying and baking, added depth and complexity to traditional recipes. Delving deeper, in many Indonesian societies, food preparation is a communal activity, with cooking as a platform for bonding and storytelling. Festivals and religious celebrations are incomplete without preparing and consuming traditional dishes, symbolizing cultural continuity and honoring ancestral traditions.

In addition, the equatorial climate in Indonesia ensures an abundance of tropical fruits and vegetables, such as long beans, water spinach, green beans, mangoes, bananas, and pineapples. The tropical rainforests of Indonesia yield an array of spices, including cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon, which have been coveted commodities and pivotal to the development of Indonesia's spice-based cuisines. Sumatra, with its fertile land, has developed a cuisine that emphasizes the use of coconut milk and chili peppers, resulting in rich and spicy dishes like *Rendang*. In contrast, the cuisine of Java showcases a milder flavor

profile, focusing on vegetable-based dishes like *Gado-gado*. The eastern regions, such as Bali and Sulawesi, exhibit influences from their maritime connections, featuring an abundance of seafood-based dishes, such as *Sate Lilit* (a type of satay made from minced fish mixed with coconut, lime leaves, and various spices) and *Pallu Basa* (a soup features a variety of seafood cooked in a flavorful broth made from turmeric, lemongrass, and other spices).

The geography and climate of Indonesia have significantly influenced the availability of ingredients, shaping the culinary practices of each region. According to Yudhistira and Fatmawati [32], *Soto*, originating from Chinese cuisine, has undergone remarkable acculturation and integration into Indonesian local cultures, particularly among the Javanese. The two authors identified up to 75 distinct forms of *Soto*, each distinguished by the particular type of broth and herbs employed in its preparation. *Soto* displays fascinating diversity and uniqueness throughout Indonesia, with distinct varieties flourishing in different regions. This culinary evolution results from *Soto's* adaptation to the cultural practices and natural resources available in each area, resulting in a plethora of unique *Soto* renditions characterized by their specific choice of ingredients. Meanwhile, in their comprehensive study, Surya and Tedjakusuma [33] meticulously explored the remarkable diversity and geographical dispersion of 110 distinct sambal varieties in Indonesia, drawing from a range of authoritative cookbooks. *Sambal*, a traditional chili sauce, also holds a significant position in Indonesian culinary culture, having been an integral condiment for countless generations.

In doing so, ethnic food can be defined as gastronomic creations deeply intertwined with the heritage and cultural traditions of a specific ethnic community. These delicacies are prepared with great care, often using locally sourced ingredients, many of which are native to the region, showcasing the profound culinary knowledge of the group. Therefore, dishes like *Rendang*, *Gado-gado*, *Soto*, *Satay*, *Nasi Goreng* are included into the category. However, the phenomenon of a national cuisine becoming globally recognized in foreign lands arises from the fact that in foreign countries, national dishes are frequently perceived as representative of a particular ethnic group. Hence, Thai food, Italian food, Korean Food, Malaysian food, and Indonesian foods are universally acknowledged as emblematic of their respective cultures when enjoyed beyond their countries of origin [34–38].

The comprehension of the diverse and culturally significant Indonesian ethnic foods serves as a catalyst for enhancing the acknowledgement of their key role in elevating a nation's global prominence. Previous scholarly works by Rockower [11, 12], Zhang [39], Chapple-Sokol

[40], and Luša and Jakešević [41] have extensively examined the concept and significance of gastrodiplo-macy in enhancing a nation's branding attempts as part of soft power strategies that middle-power countries preferably do. Rockower and Zhang have provided insights into successful instances of utilizing food as a tool of diplomacy and implementing gastrodiplo-macy in countries like Thailand, South Korea, and Peru [11, 12, 39]. These two works also demonstrate how food can be employed as both a means of diplomacy and a way to highlight that state actors are not the only agents of diplomacy. In a further study, Zhang conducted more research on the concept of 'gastrodiplo-macy', aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its scope by encompassing a wider range of actors. Furthermore, the study emphasized the objective of conveying a targeted message to the global community at large through the medium of food [39]. In a similar vein, Rockower also stated that gastrodiplo-macy is an emerging aspect of public diplomacy in which nations are increasingly collaborating with non-state actors to engage with overseas audiences [11]. Diplomatic activities within the framework of modern public diplomacy have shifted away from a state-centric approach.

The previous scholarly works on gastrodiplo-macy focused mainly on demonstrating gastrodiplo-macy potential as an effective diplomatic instrument for nations. However, these studies did not delve into the specific strategies and methods that countries might employ to implement a successful gastrodiplo-macy campaign. Meanwhile, there is a scarcity of academic research that provides comprehensive insights into the role of culinary businesses, particularly restaurants, as a viable means of implementing gastrodiplo-macy. Additionally, there is a lack of academic discourse that specifically addresses the presence and potential of Indonesian restaurants in foreign countries as an avenue for promoting ethnic food internationally. Indonesian restaurants located outside of Indonesia have received relatively limited attention in academic dialogs.

Van Otterloo's groundbreaking study in 2002 [42] was a seminal work that explored Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands, offering insights into their historical presence dating back to the colonial era. Yayusman et al. [43] research extended this exploration, delving into these Indonesian dining establishments in the Netherlands, and placing their existence in the broader context of the Gastrodiplo-macy initiative, "Indonesia Spice Up the World." According to Narottama and Sudarmawan, the 1980s marked the emergence of at least two specialized Indonesian cuisine restaurants in Paris [44]. The first establishment, "Indonesia", came into being in 1982 and was founded on the core principles of familial ties and

cooperative collaboration. Notably, Sobron Aidit, one of the proprietors, found himself compelled to relocate to Paris following the political upheaval that transpired in Indonesia in 1965. The second eatery, known as “Djakarta Bali,” situated on Rue Vauvilliers, shares a similar narrative regarding its proprietors, who are Indonesian exiles following the 1965 National Tragedy. These restaurants represent not only culinary enterprises but also serve as poignant reminders of the historical and personal narratives that have shaped the Indonesian diaspora in Paris.

This initiative emphasized the pivotal role played by the Indonesian diaspora, serving as significant non-state actors, such as IDN Task Force Culinary in France in promoting Indonesian gastrodiplomacy. It is imperative for the academic community to engage in more extensive discussions regarding Indonesian gastrodiplomacy across diverse international settings, including Australia as one of the closest neighboring countries. This gap in discourse is primarily attributable to the relatively early stage of the gastrodiplomacy program’s development.

#### **On considering Australia: an overview of Indonesia’s current presence**

Indonesian ethnic cuisine, with its distinctive characteristics, embodies a wealth of diversity that mirrors the robust historical and cultural aspects of Indonesia. If the objective of Indonesia’s gastrodiplomacy initiative is to strengthen the nation’s brand image on an international level, the recognition of Indonesian ethnic foods as an instrument of diplomacy holds great significance. The practise of gastrodiplomacy is arguably prospective when it also initially targets a country that has strong ties to Indonesia. Australia is not an exception.

Following Indonesian independence, some Indonesians were temporarily placed in Australia for educational purposes, under the Colombo Plan, which began in the 1950s. Later, when the influx of non-Europeans slowed down in the late 1960s, more Indonesians moved to Australia, with their numbers increasing fourfold between 1986 and 1996. In 2016, there were 73,213 Indonesia-born residents in Australia, with 56.9% of the Indonesia-born population arriving prior to 2007 [45]. In the late June of 2021, the number of Indonesia-born residents in Australia increased to 89,480 [14].

The recent growth of distinct ethnic populations in Australia, coupled with a lack of employment opportunities, has compelled ethnic groups to establish small businesses for generating income by serving a particular market. In tandem with the increase in population movement, ethnic businesses flourish, thus resulting in the establishment of ethnic restaurants, catering services, retail stores, and travel agencies. This includes the

rise of Indonesian restaurants and catering businesses in Australia.

Ethnic food has the ability to contribute to the growth, promotion, and strengthening of intercultural connections [46]. Strickland [47] defines an ethnic restaurant in Australia as “a location that prepares and sells food that is geographically, historically, or culturally linked to a group of people that are felt by themselves or others to constitute separate people with distinct cuisine.” Accordingly, Indonesian business cuisines in Australia fit within this group.

Nonetheless, the number of Indonesian restaurants and catering businesses in Australia is not proportional to the foreign public’s awareness of Indonesian cuisine in Australia. For example, Liaw [48], a Malaysian–Australian chef who blogs for the Australian public broadcaster SBS, emphasizes how foreign recipes have influenced Australia’s current foodscape. Indonesia, Australia’s closest neighbor, is, however, conspicuously absent from the country’s culinary imagination. In addition, according to research on Australian customers’ preferences for Asian ethnic food from six Asian nations, their favorites comprise Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Korean, Indian, and Vietnamese cuisines [18]. Based upon these facts, it is argued that the recognition of Indonesian ethnic food as an option for Asian food among foreigners in Australia is lacking. Improving Indonesian’s recognition in relation with its nearest neighbor, notably through food, is crucial in response to this situation. Given its ancient historical roots among the Indonesian diaspora, and its strong bilateral relations with Indonesia, Australia deserves to be a pilot country that the Indonesian government should prioritize for implementing ISUTW.

In addition, a number of initiatives supporting Indonesian gastrodiplomacy has been there, and these could be suitably harnessed. First, the Indonesian and Australian governments have concluded the Indonesia–Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA), which came into effect on July 5, 2020. It exempted Indonesian exports, including spices and seasonings from tariffs. Second, the Indonesian Embassy in Australia has implemented culinary promotion activities in the past, such as (1) the annual Indonesian festival held at the embassy and (2) workshops for Indonesian restaurant owners in collaboration with the Indonesian diaspora community. Likewise, the Indonesian Consulate General in Sydney has incorporated gastrodiplomacy into multiple diplomatic agendas. On multiple occasions, the Consulate General has collaborated with Indonesia’s Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and VITO Australia. The tasks that have been completed through such collaboration include Taste of Indonesia,

Gastronomy Family Trip, blogger reviews in local media, and market intelligence gathering [49].

Third, the Indonesian Consulate General in Sydney, wherein the majority of Indonesians reside, reports that there are approximately 60 restaurants in New South Wales [49]. Furthermore, the Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has granted co-branding status to a number of restaurants operating under the slogan 'Wonderful Indonesia.' It can be seen that, there has been continued interest in developing the Indonesian food trajectory in Australia, particularly among the diasporas. The Indonesian Restaurant Association (IRA) has also contributed to the presence of Indonesian restaurants in Australia. The IRA was established in December 2018, following the Wonderful Indonesia Gastronomy Forum. The IRA represents Indonesian restaurants in Australia, that is, 37 Indonesian restaurants and industrial catering businesses in New South Wales [50].

Fourth, the accredited area of the Indonesian Consulate General in Sydney is home to approximately 41,236 Indonesian diasporas, the largest in Australia. The majority of them have focused on the production and promotion of Indonesian food. Food and beverage importers such as Sony Trading and Eastern Cross Trading, grocery store owners, as well as producers of tofu and tempeh (a traditional Javanese soy product made from fermented soybeans) are on the diaspora's list of potential entrepreneurs [49].

#### **Understanding Indonesia's culinary business in Australia**

There are more than 150 Indonesian restaurants in Australia, according to Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Diplomacy Directorate [5]. Within this figure, it is predicted that a portion of these establishments includes restaurants and stores that offer authentic Indonesian cuisine and cooking ingredients. The Indonesian food offerings span various regional specialties, ranging from Javanese and Balinese to Sumatran dishes.

For instance, Shalom Restaurant, for instance, has more than seven branches spread across Sydney and Brisbane, serving several Indonesian dishes such as *Ayam Goreng*, *Ayam Betutu*, *Rawon*, *Batagor*, *Martabak*, *Gado-gado*, *Pempek*, *Nasi Goreng*, and *Ayam Taliwang*. Further, other Indonesian restaurants, such as Dapur Bali, Sendok Garpu, and Jakarta Indonesian Restaurant, are popular among Brisbane-based Indonesian students. In Sydney, about 18 restaurants serve Indonesian food. Among them are as follows: Lestari Restaurant, Ayam Goreng 99, Medan Ciak, Mie Kocok Bandung, Delima Restaurant, Ubud, Indo Rasa Java, and Jimbaran. In Melbourne, the Indonesian restaurants like Dapur Indo Nusantara, Warung Gudug, Es Teler 77 Blok M, Kedai Satay, Bali Bagus, Nelayan Indonesian, and Salero Kito have been in

operation for more than a decade. The restaurants Pondok Bali, Cafe Gembira, and Ketut's Kitchen serve Indonesian dishes in Adelaide and South Australia. In Perth and Western Australia, one can visit Indonesian restaurants such as Es Teler 77, Indonesia Indah, Manise Cafe, Sparrow Indonesia, Tasik Indonesian Restaurant, and Kartini. Since only a few Indonesians reside in Canberra, Darwin, and Hobart, the Indonesian hospitality business here, particularly food and drink, is less developed than in other Australian cities. However, some home catering and food stall businesses do serve Indonesian culinary delights at affordable prices.

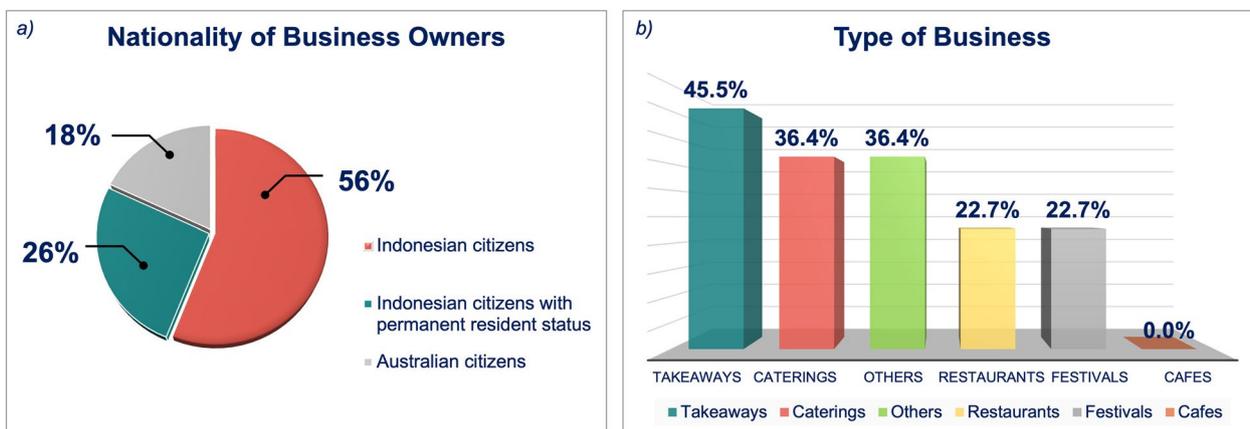
After presenting various Indonesian restaurants and home catering opportunities as seen above, the next section of this paper maps out the culinary business atmosphere and consumer behaviors of people in Australia. It does so through their culinary encounters, when they visit Indonesian restaurants and taste Indonesian ethnic foods. It reflects potential lessons that could be learned and maximized along with the implementation of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy strategy.

The response rate for the survey was notably high, with approximately 63% of business owners completing the survey questions, and roughly 70% of Indonesian students or their family members fully participating in the survey.

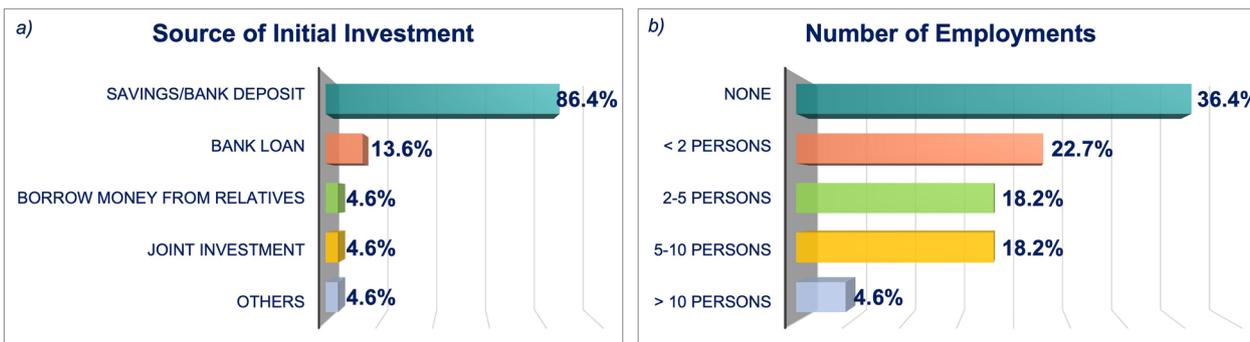
About fifteen business entities have Indonesian nationality, while 12 are Australian nationals or Indonesians who hold permanent residence in Australia. More than 45% of their businesses are generated through takeaways, catering, and other businesses, mainly home delivery services. Only 22.7% of them run restaurants (see Fig. 2).

According to the survey, more than half of Indonesian diaspora culinary business owners have resided in Australia for more than five years, yet their average business tenure is less than five years. The majority of people who rely on culinary businesses as their principal source of income are retired government officers or academics. Thus, the majority of the initial investment for a culinary business comes from personal savings (86.4%) (see Fig. 3). Citizens of Indonesia have limited access to formal banking institutions. Nevertheless, the social relationships of the diaspora are well-managed within the Indonesian community, although joint businesses and finance from relatives are not as well established as in the Vietnamese and Thai communities.

Figure 3 also shows that several restaurant owners have a limited number of employees. Particularly during the COVID-19 outbreak, several restaurant owners slashed staff wages and reduced the number of part-time staff. Sacking employees or asking help from relatives were some of the solutions for small businesses with a high financial risk. Most culinary businesses at present only



**Fig. 2** Nationality of business owners and types of businesses. Figure (a) presents the survey findings pertaining to the nationalities of Indonesian culinary business owners in Australia. A half of the owners (50%) own Indonesian citizenship. In the meantime, figure (b) depicts the various categories of businesses operated by business owners across many cities in Australia. A mere 27% of business owners run restaurants



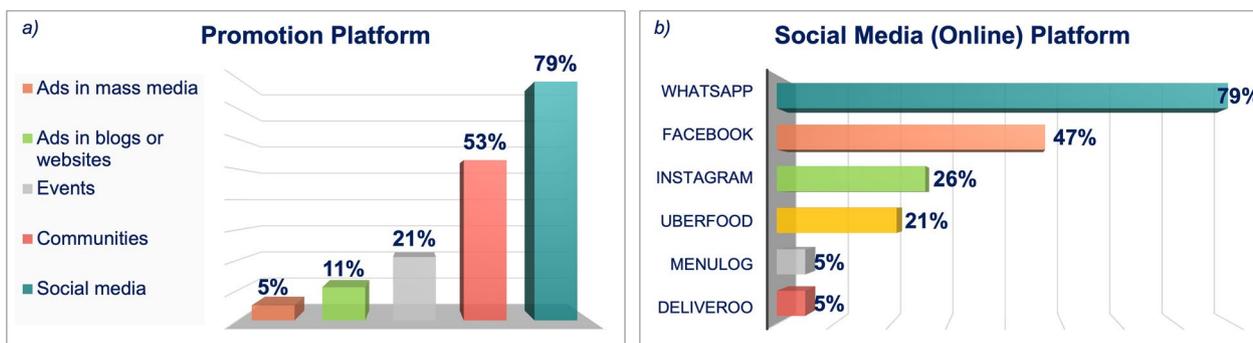
**Fig. 3** Sources of initial investment and number of employments. Figure (a) displays the results of a survey about the primary sources of initial investment utilized by Indonesian culinary business owners in Australia to finance their operations. Individuals often rely on personal savings and/or bank deposits as their primary financial resources. Figure (b) illustrates the quantity of employment usually recruited in Indonesian restaurants or home catering

have less than two staff. During and after the pandemic, food sales from restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops struggled, while food sales from grocery stores faced problems in the food supply chain due to limited transportation services and storage facilities.

In the arena of gastrodplomacy, publications through certain media to promote national foods in restaurants and catering businesses is essential. Most respondents (79%) favor social media promotion (see Fig. 4). Online social media is inevitably faster and more effective in spreading news and information across Australia. Using social media groups such as WhatsApp Messenger is regarded as the best way for disseminating promotional material (79%). Facebook is the second most popular alternative channel for information sharing and promotion (47%) (see Fig. 4). Therefore, employing social media for future ISUTW promotion is arguably a smart strategy. In Fig. 4, 53% of respondents indicated that

information dissemination through communities was the second-most effective strategy. It is particularly relevant while promoting their businesses to fellow group members such as sports, religious, or study clubs.

Festivals and cultural events are also one of the most effective means of promoting national and ethnic foods (21%) (see Fig. 4). Being a member of a professional association or community, such as IRA or other Indonesian associations in Australia, regardless of their personal background (religious affiliation, occupation, age group, and so on), is another strategy for promotion. The Indonesian government has also set up several programs through the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra or the General Consulate in Sydney to help food sellers promote ethnic foods. One of these programs is the provision of facilities at a trade fair for the food, beverage, and hospitality industries.



**Fig. 4** Promotional platforms used by Indonesian restaurants and home catering businesses. Figure (a) illustrates the primary promotional platforms employed by business owners in Australia to advertise their Indonesian culinary businesses, such as restaurants or home catering services. According to the survey results, social media platforms are the most preferred means of communication, with a significant proportion of 79% of respondents expressing a preference for these channels. Figure (b) illustrates that WhatsApp Messenger, with a usage rate of 79%, is the predominant social media tool employed for the purpose of promoting culinary businesses in a group form

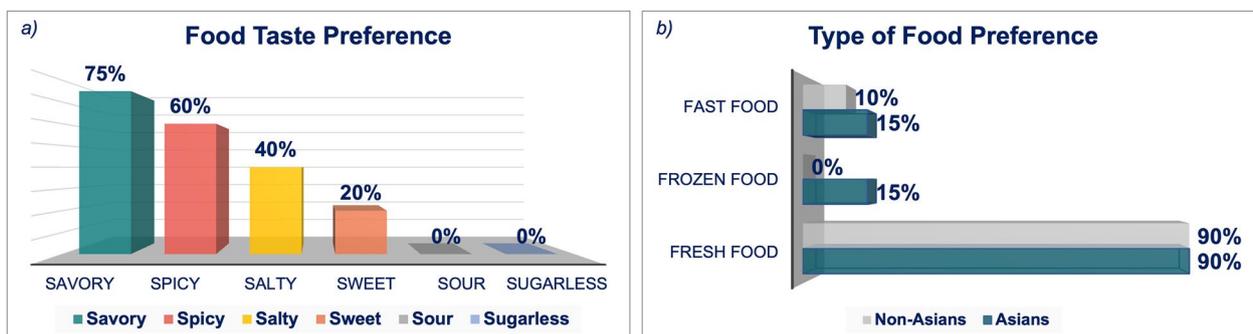
Through the above surveys, this study provides a preliminary understanding of the history and experiences of how Indonesian business owners start, operate, and continue to promote their culinary businesses in Australia. These findings could be used to determine the types of businesses that should be further developed, especially Indonesian restaurants as part of ISUTW. The findings could also be used to identify the obstacles and difficulties, which may arise due to a lack of focus on sources of investment and support during the establishment and operation of a business, particularly during and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Indonesia’s culinary business consumers’ behaviors**

This section addresses the culinary environment from the standpoint of the consumer. Understanding their preferences and habits about Indonesian food might provide an opportunity for Indonesia to enter the Australian market

and accelerate an appropriate implementation of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy, like ISUTW, in Australia.

Savory and salty foods are in high demand, reaching 75% and 40% of consumers respectively (see Fig. 5). A number of people in Australia surprisingly enjoys spicy foods. They also mostly choose fresh food (90%) over frozen or fast food (see Fig. 5). These preferences are also consistent with what several restaurateurs and restaurant employees have observed about consumer behavior in Indonesian restaurants. For instance, an Indonesian culinary business kitchen manager argued that Indonesia’s availability of fast or express food is quite limited, while its presence would be a great idea to increase Indonesian food popularity; yet, people in Australia are now mindful of the need to embrace a healthier life [51]. *Gado-gado* might be a preferred menu, which combines the spirit of healthy lifestyle and the presence of Indonesian fast food in Australia. Although *Gado-gado* is not among the top five most popular Indonesian foods in Australia, and just



**Fig. 5** Food taste and type of food preference in Indonesian restaurants and home catering businesses. Figure (a) illustrates the preferences of consumers for the flavor of Indonesian ethnic food offered at Indonesian restaurants in Australia. A majority of the participants (business owners) (75%) indicated that they find foods with a savory taste to be the most preferred option. In Figure (b), the vast majority of culinary business owners in Australia (90%) assert that freshly served Indonesian cuisine is highly preferred by most consumers

20% of consumers consider it their favorite (see Fig. 6), it has the potential to be a nutritious fast food that might promote the presentation of Indonesian food in the future. Its nature, which comprises of fresh ingredients that can be quickly served and consumed, is compatible with the prevalent local preferences.

Additionally, it is evident that understanding consumer preferences is essential. To accommodate consumers' preferences, chefs have modified or fused certain ethnic foods (55%) (see Fig. 6). In Indonesian restaurants and home caterings in Australia, Satay (50%), *Nasi Goreng* (45%), and Indonesian Meatballs or so called *Bakso* (40%) have become the most popular dishes (see Fig. 6). It should come as no surprise that Satay and Meatball are two of the most appealing menu options. Satay is usually made of beef or chicken and served with peanut sauce or sweet soy sauce, whereas Meatballs are made of beef or chicken, rolled into a circle, and eaten with noodles or rice vermicelli (*Bihun*). In the meantime, Australia has one of the highest levels of meat consumption in the world, approximately 89.2 kg per capita in 2021[52]. Given the fact that the locals in Australia love meat, Satay may be promoted more in Indonesian restaurants and catering services, with adjustments to suit the local palate. Since the Indonesian government has set up five Indonesian foods that should initially be introduced and promoted within the ISUTW program, which are as follows: *Satay*, *Nasi Goreng*, *Gado-Gado*, *Soto*, and *Rendang*. It is also crucial to consider other priority meals that have not yet reached the consumers' attention in Australia, such as *Gado-gado* (20%) and *Soto* (15%) (see Fig. 6). *Gado-gado* and *Soto* apparently have a good possibility to become the Indonesian ethnic food of choice among the local people in Australia. Their ingredients, consisting of fresh vegetables for *Gado-gado* and chicken

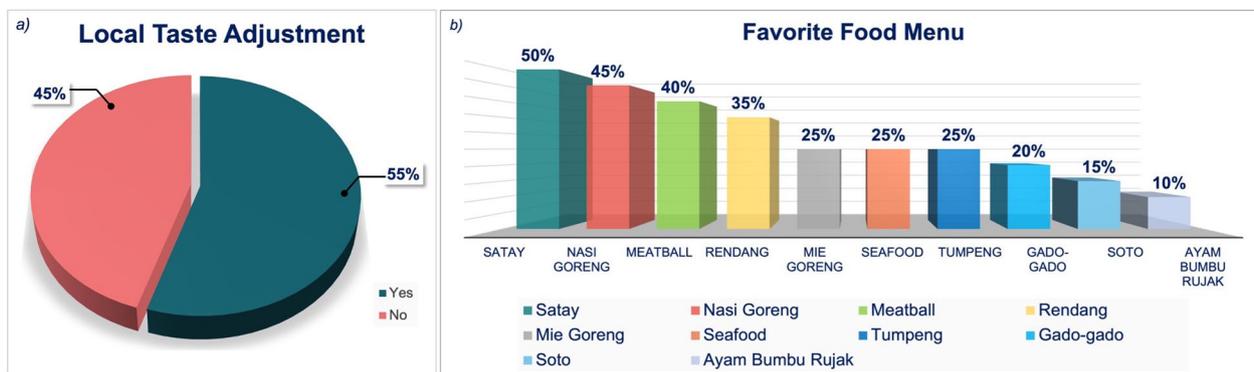
or beef for *Soto*, are in line with contemporary local tastes, which continue to favor meat, but seek another healthy diet.

Based on the above preferences, the Indonesian government and diaspora, including restaurant and home catering business owners, could offer foods that have been adapted to local tastes. On the other hand, this study may shed light on which other food items should be concerned, because they have the opportunity to be marketed and to flourish despite being less popular.

**Prospects and strategies to accelerate Indonesia's ethnic foods business in Australia**

It is self-evident that diasporas, with their ethnic restaurants and home caterings in Australia, play a crucial role in assisting Indonesia's initiative to promote Indonesian ethnic foods, as seen by their ability to draw numerous loyal customers. Even though the majority of customers are diasporas from Indonesia or other Asian countries, there is still room for Indonesian restaurants to extend their target market to include the natives. Being committed to win hearts and minds of foreign people in other countries as the objective of gastrodiploacy strategy, the Indonesian government may see these prospects as an opportunity for better implementation and greater focus upon Australia. Enhancing collaboration and innovation in response to local needs may be recommended as a means to effectively implement gastrodiploacy practices there, not limited to ISUTW.

Collaboration between state and non-state actors should be actively undertaken to maximize the Indonesian culinary business potential. Incorporation of non-state actors is a solid starting point for understanding the aspirations of the diaspora. Arguably, it remains unclear if Indonesian diasporas in Australia have actively



**Fig. 6** Local taste and favorite food menus in Indonesian restaurants and home catering businesses. Figure (a) depicts a result of a survey regarding Indonesian culinary business owners' endeavors to attract consumers in Australia. Approximately 55% of individuals concur that adapting to the preferences of the local palate is crucial. Besides, figure (b) illustrates the prevailing Indonesian ethnic cuisine preferences among individuals residing in Australia. Satay, including the chicken and beef varieties, is widely regarded as the most preferred option among consumers

contributed to the formulation of that strategy. Essential to Indonesia's culinary promotion is the function of a network collaborator to connect all stakeholders, including the Indonesian government and diasporas who run culinary businesses in Australia. Non-governmental actors, such as the Indonesia Gastronomy Network (IGN) or the Indonesia Gastronomy Community (IGC), could play a crucial role as network collaborators. It is self-evident that this approach has worked effectively when IGN supported the Indonesian government in formulating ISUTW's narratives by addressing the diverse aspirations of several stakeholders. Here, IGN attempted to link the existing networks and assisted those stakeholders who were willing to collaborate [53].

Further, identifying obstacles related to restaurant openings and export procedures for ingredient spices, which are experienced by Indonesian business owners, are important as an initial step. This attempt could encourage an inclusive collaboration that accommodates the needs of Indonesian business owners, while acting as an agent of diplomacy for Indonesian gastrodiplomacy overseas. For instance, according to the representative of Indonesia's Ministry of Trade, there are four challenges to the export of spices to Australia, including product quality, regulatory requirements, consumers' behavior, and access to market information [54]. In addition to establishing robust support for Indonesian diasporas, a stronger partnership between Indonesia and Australia is necessary to be formed. The collaboration between both governments has actually been there since the indenture-ship of IA-CEPA. Under this framework, for instance, both have taken an initial step to open a trading house in Sydney, which provides knowledge, strategy, and capacity-building on how to access the Australian market and start a business there [54]. Indonesia's Business of Commerce (KADIN) initiated this idea. It is arguably advantageous for Indonesian diasporas, who prefer to run businesses in Australia, particularly culinary businesses.

Additionally, innovations for the culinary industry and expanded market potential are arguably important. According to the data survey, most citizens in Australia, regardless of any ethnicities, frequently enjoy fresh food in Indonesian restaurants and caterings (90%) (see Fig. 5). In line with this finding, An Indonesian diaspora, opined that, in order to compete with other Asian restaurants such as Thai and Vietnamese restaurants, Indonesian restaurants should consider serving innovative fast food that is fresh and healthy [51]. The popularity of vegan lifestyle behaviors has also surged [55]. Today, many individuals choose veganism as their lifestyle. In the future, a new form of Indonesian restaurant overseas should also consider that preference. In addition to restaurant openings, establishing an Indonesian food truck or express

food stall could be an innovation to promote Indonesian foods.

For Indonesian food promotion, it is also vital to consider the development of fast or express food stalls [51]. This is because people can discover fast food stalls or food trucks more easily, as they are located on every street corner. It does not require a large amount of money for capital or rent and could be an option for expanding the number of Indonesian restaurants on a scale that is less ambitious. Also, *Gado-gado*, a vegetable salad served with peanut sauce, and Indonesian Meatballs or so called *Bakso* with pepper in broth, may become an alternative menu to be provided in a food truck, offering a nutritious and quickly served Indonesian dish. This option is suggested, based on the survey results of consumers' preferences. *Gado-gado* is not as popular in Indonesian restaurants in Australia; only about 20% of respondents opined that *Gado-gado* is one of their restaurant's most popular menu items. Nonetheless, there is a huge chance to promote it because of the shifted eating habit in the society. Indonesian meatballs, often known as *Bakso*, can be conveniently produced in a domestic setting and quickly delivered to customers at food stalls. *Bakso* is a notable example of Indonesian cuisine that showcases the use of ethnic spices, particularly pepper, in its flavorful broth. The notable popularity of *Bakso*, ranking among the top five favorite Indonesian dishes according to the survey (refer to Fig. 6), is expected to contribute to the long-term viability of the Indonesian food truck business. This is due to the broad recognition of *Bakso* among the population. Additionally, *Bakso* which is commonly made of beef is regarded as one of the preferred meal choices among the natives in Australia.

Furthermore, most people in Australia arguably enjoy eating meat. Australia has a long history as a meat-loving nation and remains one of the largest meat-consuming nations [56]. Meat has also been a staple part of Australian diets for as long as the continent has been occupied by humans [57]. Further, Marinova and Bogueva [58] also indicate that meat continues to be viewed as necessary for a healthy diet. Bogueva, et. al. [59] add that meat tended to be associated with terms such as 'iron', 'protein', and 'staple dietary requirement'. If the objective of gastrodiplomacy is to capture the hearts and minds of foreign people and to reach the public at large aligned with the vision of public diplomacy, it is undeniable that knowing the preferred food menu of people in Australia is also necessary. Learning about the behavior of Australian consumers can inspire the Indonesian diasporas that run culinary businesses and the Indonesian government to consider what foods should be served and innovated concurrently. For instance, *Satay* has now become the most popular menu item at Indonesian restaurants. This

innovation could be used as a model for food promotion in Australia, where the population enjoys simple meat servings.

The above-mentioned insights for adaptations and innovations could potentially constitute a good beginning to fill the lacunae in the implementation of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy strategy including ISUTW in Australia. The principles of gastrodiplomacy involving the engagement on a cultural and personal level with everyday diners [60] and seek to win the hearts and minds of foreign peoples [11, 12] would be practiced underpinned by measurements and evidence gained from the facts gathered in this study. State may become the primary actor in gastrodiplomacy execution; however, non-state ones are highly relevant for creating an inclusive gastrodiplomacy strategy, particularly Indonesian diasporas. Embracing Indonesian ethnic food, which encompasses a diverse array of spices, ingredients, and cultural and historical tales, is vital to authentically portray the entirety of Indonesia.

## Conclusion

Food is said to be ethnic, when it comes from diverse regions that have crossed international borders, is influenced by the culture of a particular ethnic group and uses local ingredients that are seen favorably by customers from outside that ethnic group [34]. The Indonesian gastrodiplomacy strategy such as ISUTW promoting Indonesian ethnic foods is arguably a great leap for Indonesia in developing a structured and robust gastrodiplomacy plan to showcase the country's plethora of food and spices. With regard to the existence of Indonesian restaurants overseas, Australia is the right option for initially executing Indonesia gastrodiplomacy strategy. Australia is home to sizable Indonesian diasporas, whose ownership of restaurants and home catering businesses demonstrates their considerable influence. Their roles are crucial, bringing Indonesian ethnic foods internationally. Moreover, they have built a network to foster coordination among Indonesian restaurants in Australia, though it remains actively operational chiefly in New South Wales. There is a lot of room for growth in this sector, at present, because Indonesian food promotion is getting a lot more attention. In addition, our survey reveals that Indonesian restaurants have successfully reached overseas consumers and attracted loyal customers. Local people in Australia can also enjoy Indonesian food, especially those who have adjusted to the local palate. Some of Indonesian ethnic foods have settled its popularity in Australia. Beef or Chicken Satay, for instance, is among the most famous foods in Indonesian overseas restaurants. Using social media as a promotional platform, mainly WhatsApp Messenger and Facebook that are most used by

people in Australia, could also be an element to accelerate food promotion to foreign publics (Additional file 1).

## Supplementary Information

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**Additional file 1: Appendix.** List of Survey Questions.

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## Author contributions

All authors equally contributed to the design and writing of this manuscript.

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## Availability of data and materials

The data and materials used in this manuscript are available upon request.

## Declarations

### Competing interests

There is no competing interest.

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