Guest editorial

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Opportunities and challenges at the nexus of coffee, tea, and tourism

Tea and coffee, two of the most consumed nonalcoholic beverages globally (The Business Research Company, 2020), are crucially traded commodities and the main livelihood of thousands of families in the tea-growing or coffee bean belt countries. For instance, almost five million smallholders in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda heavily rely on coffee and tea farming (Wesolek, 2020), and 94% of the tea production of Sri Lanka is exported overseas, with a 15% contribution to total foreign exchange earnings (Munasinghe *et al.*, 2020). Beyond their vital role as economic development vehicles for many developing countries, tea and coffee are closely linked to the unique natural and cultural heritages of both production and consumption regions. The traditional coffee-making ceremony, which represents union, respect and hospitality, is seen as a cultural symbol and indigenous identity of the Ethiopians (Kleidas and Jolliffe, 2010). Sado, a Japanese tea ritual associated with Zen Buddhism, is practiced to pursue the Japanese philosophy of solitude, simplicity and imperfection (Global Japanese Tea Association, 2020). Furthermore, tea and coffee can also play essential roles for “gastrodiplomacy,” in which local food and beverage are introduced to foreign publics. This is observed in the “Turkish Coffee Truck” initiative, which successfully promotes Turkish culture through Turkish coffee for US citizens (Suntikul, 2017).

It is evident that drinking coffee and tea is not only part of people’s daily routines in the 21st century but also a way to experience the “terroir” of the coffee- and tea-growing areas (Lyon, 2013). Indeed, the rise of the experience economy and the third-wave coffee movement (Skeie, 2003) has led to increased enthusiasm for tea and coffee knowledge and connoisseurship. Consumers are keen to explore the rich narratives behind the gastronomic culture and geographic heritage that tea and coffee convey. Furthermore, tea houses, coffee shops and street cafés have become inseparably woven into the social lives of many communities and been hailed as “third places,” which are “public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). Therefore, for modern consumers, coffee and tea have become a symbol and a culture instead of just daily beverage. This booming interest in “experiencing” coffee and tea and the popularity of relevant establishments have unlocked a rising niche tourism or special-interest tourism market: tea and coffee tourism (Anbalagan and Lovelock, 2014). As the cost and promotion of such tourism are much less and more accessible than other forms of economic development, such as manufacturing, governments, plantation owners and farmers worldwide are making efforts to arrange tours and offer unique tourism experiences related to tea and coffee production, consumption and traditions. The creation of coffee or tea tourism undoubtedly provides alternative income sources and training opportunities for small- and medium-scale farmers in less developed countries (Lyon, 2013). Despite the economic benefits, these initiatives are not exempt from problems and challenges.

Given that most coffee and tea tourists are motivated by meaningful tourism experiences and learning opportunities, tour operators should provide well-trained tour guides with in-depth knowledge of coffee, tea and tourism and hospitality to meet customers’ needs and wants

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(Wang *et al.*, 2019). However, many tea and coffee estates lack human resources to handle such requirements and expectations. Furthermore, the tour guides may not be well-equipped with relevant knowledge to engage actively and manage tourists on-site (Anbalagan and Lovelock, 2014). The absence of effective planning, investment, marketing and stakeholder collaboration also leads to vague destination images, poor service quality, low tourist satisfaction and environmental degradation. These problems prohibit destinations from realizing the potential of coffee and tea tourism and achieving sustainable development goals (Woyesa and Kumar, 2021). Apart from operational challenges, when compared to wine tourism, coffee and tea tourism as research topics have not been extensively discussed in academia. Scholars tend to view them as subsets of other tourism such as rural tourism, food tourism, cultural tourism or ecotourism. As a result, the concepts and theories used for such investigations are quite heterogeneous. The fragmentation of the literature and the lack of a holistic understanding are preventing the advancement of tea and coffee tourism research. Therefore, this special issue explored the opportunities and challenges created by coffee and tea tourism to extend knowledge pertaining to the subject matter and provide meaningful insights to the industry and stakeholders.

This special issue includes 11 articles with a broad spectrum of research topics and methods in global geographical coverage, including museum experiences around the world, tourism interpretation in Japan, coffee tourism development in Colombia and Ethiopia, tea traditions in Germany, coffee house experiences in Turkey and Hong Kong, Gen Y and Z intentions to visit coffee and tea plantations in Malaysia and systematic literature reviews of coffee and tea tourism research. In particular, there is a strong interest in tourism experiences, with several articles contributing to enhancing the knowledge related to unique experiences that coffee and tea tourism offer from both the supply and demand sides.

For the demand side, Seyitoğlu and Alphan (2021) analyze tea and coffee museum experiences by using travelers' English online reviews. A total of nine tea and coffee museums in seven different countries are included in this research. The results indicate that the tea and coffee museum experience is a multidimensional concept with educational, authentic, memorable, participatory and shopping experiences, atmosphere, facilities, employees and tour guides and negative experiences as the most salient themes. Yigit and Şahin Perçin (2021) use tourist comments collected through TripAdvisor, a user-generated content platform, to explore the experiences of tourists in the Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul, Turkey. They find that Turkish coffee house experiences are heterogeneous, and the most salient dimensions are coffee characteristics, place, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price and value-added experiences, including three subthemes, namely, memorable, authentic and cultural learning experiences. Cheung *et al.* (2021) adapt consumption value theory to examine the influence of tourist perceived consumption value dimensions of tea beverages offered by Hong Kong-style cafés on memorable experiences, satisfaction and revisit intentions. This study suggests memorable experiences, satisfaction and revisit intentions are influenced by specific consumption value elements for tea beverages, including taste, price, health and emotional values.

For the supply side, the case study conducted by Dinis *et al.* (2021) explores how the Coffee Science Centre in Portugal as a tourist attraction helps disseminate coffee culture and assist with the establishment of coffee tourism. They highlight the importance of the attraction in a coffee consumption destination to introduce local coffee culture to tourists, thus differentiating and enriching coffee tourism experiences in a sustainable way. Generally, coffee or tea tourism destinations can be categorized into three main types:

1. producing or growing regions;
2. places with rich cultures; and
3. historical destinations (Jolliffe, 2007; Jolliffe, 2010).

The mainstream of coffee and tea tourism research focuses on the issues in growing and producing destinations. Therefore, these four articles contribute in shedding light on understanding tourism experiences in destinations with unique cultures and traditions. They constitute a cornerstone for many more future studies on these themes.

Another set of research contribution in this special issue examines the challenges and opportunities in the marketing and management of coffee/tea tourism destinations and attractions. In coffee-growing areas, various coffee tourism products are provided to attract tourists. However, how to effectively manage and increase competitive advantage through unique offerings frequently challenges the involved stakeholders. Using the resource-based view theory, [Bowen \(2021\)](#) uses an exploratory approach with analytical auto-ethnography to discover the potential for coffee tourism development in a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Eje Cafetero region of Colombia. The results derived from his reflective diary, photographic documentation and observations reveal that a strategic vision to build on the positive reputation of critical attributes, authentic experiences and good travel infrastructure in facilitating access to the remote area are equally important in promoting tourism opportunities. This study further points out that the tourism businesses owned by external companies and unevenness within the tourism provision creates issues for improving the local economy in the coffee area, which deserves more future research. [Degarege and Lovelock \(2021\)](#) explore the tourism performance and competitiveness of Ethiopia, the birthplace of coffee. They identify that coffee can be used as one essential tourism experience to improve the local communities' socioeconomic conditions. However, this study shows that the limited interactions among governments, local coffee producers and tourism businesses hamper the development of coffee tourism. Furthermore, at the grassroots level, local farming communities and private companies in the coffee sector are not fully aware of the potential for coffee in developing tourism, which poses challenges for the sustainable development of the tourism industry and for establishing a positive destination image for Ethiopia.

For tea tourism management, [Mondal and Samaddar \(2021\)](#) conduct a morphological analysis with ethnographic and focus-group data to discover significant issues and challenges in India's tourism industry. They find that improper planning and marketing efforts, limited collaboration among stakeholders, low involvement of local people, socioeconomic inequality and consumer's attitude toward tea tourism should be improved to foster tea tourism industry sustainability. The case study conducted by [Bohne \(2021\)](#) focuses on a UNESCO-awarded tea consumption tradition, which confirms that tea culture can be a powerful tool for initiating tourism. Specifically, the "East Frisian Tea Ceremony" in Germany, offering a cozy atmosphere and social gathering opportunities, builds a strong destination brand awareness among tourists and citizens for perceiving East Frisia as a tea tourism destination. The pride of the local tea-consuming culture and its history empowers citizens to keep the tea traditions alive and has become an attractive tourism product. As for tea tourism marketing strategy, [Khaokhrueamuang et al. \(2021\)](#) investigate the potential for using the package design of Shizuoka Green Tea to promote Japanese tea tourism among Thai tourists. The results show that the packaging of bottled tea drinks can be a helpful marketing tool to inspire tea lovers to travel to specific tea tourism destinations.

Although the effectiveness of destination management and marketing is essential for creating a successful tourism product, the influence of tourist perception of risk in traveling, such as with the fear of COVID-19, on travel intentions to coffee/tea tourism destinations should not be overlooked. The study of [Yeap et al. \(2021\)](#) revealed that for Gen Y and Z consumers, despite having a positive attitude toward sustainable coffee/tea tourism plantations, their travel intentions are strongly affected by perceived risk. They suggest that COVID-19 has severely disrupted consumer travel patterns. Therefore, tour operators with coffee/tea tourism itineraries should develop strict and standard operating practices to ease such fears and include safety messages in their advertisements to boost visitor confidence when touring plantations.

Taking a comprehensive view of current tea and coffee tourism research, it was found that case studies dominate the mainstream literature. Furthermore, the scarcity of sustained theory across different studies and methodological advances may hinder the advancement of coffee and tea tourism research. These observations echo the systematic review of [Chen et al. \(2021\)](#). Considering coffee and tea tourism research are still at their infancy stages, the Guest Editors hope this special issue reduces the research gaps in the existing literature regarding coffee and tea tourism experiences and management. The findings elicited from these 11 articles provide valuable solutions for stakeholders to create effective strategies. Moreover, a good number of future academic research opportunities to further explore coffee and tea tourism in producing and consuming countries are offered. Given the changes of the business landscape and the natural environment due to defining events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and global warming, more research is needed to link sustainable development and responsible behavior among stakeholders to coffee and tea tourism ([Cheer et al., 2021](#); [Ting et al., 2020](#)). The Guest Editors thank the authors and reviewers for their contributions and hope the special issue stimulates deeper discussion and more interest in this emerging research area.

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