



E-ISSN: 2706-9591
P-ISSN: 2706-9583
IJTHM 2024; 6(1): 12-17
Received: 16-10-2023
Accepted: 21-11-2023

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Enhancing the insights of tea tourism concepts and activities in Sikkim: A fundamental study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27069583.2024.v6.i1.a.81>

Abstract

Tea tourism is burgeoning in India, captivating travelers with a desire for profound immersion in the rich tapestry of the nation's renowned tea-producing regions. This paper explores the surge in popularity, focusing on India's exceptional tea varieties and their concentrated cultivation in 15 states. Beyond its potential contribution to domestic tourism and local economies, tea tourism offers a comprehensive experience, extending beyond accommodation to active participation in the tea ecosystem. The research includes a literature review, identifying gaps, and outlines a qualitative methodology. It delves into diverse dimensions of tea tourism, emphasizing sustainability and cultural integration, concluding with insights into Sikkim's immersive offerings and recommendations for future research, ensuring the industry's economic, cultural, and environmental significance.

Keywords: Tea tourism, tea plucking, tea tasting, cultural heritage, responsible tourism

1. Introduction

In recent years, tea tourism has witnessed a notable surge in popularity in India, attracting discerning travellers seeking a profound immersion in the rich history, culture, and natural allure of the nation's renowned tea-producing regions. India, globally acknowledged as a leading tea producer, is distinguished for its exceptional tea varieties, including Darjeeling, Assam, Nilgiri, and Sikkim.

Tea cultivation is concentrated in 15 states of India, with Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala being major contributors, collectively accounting for 97 percent of the country's total production. Traditional states like Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and Karnataka have also played a role, while non-traditional states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim have recently initiated tea plantation efforts.

This burgeoning trend holds significant potential to make a substantial contribution to domestic tourism, enticing visitors from diverse regions to explore the scenic and culturally vibrant tea-growing locales. Nestled in some of India's most picturesque settings, these regions provide a unique opportunity for travellers to engage with the country's cultural heritage. Furthermore, tea tourism plays a pivotal role in fostering employment opportunities within local communities and supporting indigenous businesses.

Although the concept of tea tourism is relatively nascent globally, in India, proprietors of tea gardens featuring tea bungalows have eagerly embraced this concept, identifying it as "tea tourism." However, its scope extends beyond mere accommodation in a tea bungalow, providing a comprehensive experience of becoming an integral part of the tea ecosystem and participating in various activities associated with this aromatic beverage.

By positioning tea tourism as a more immersive and experiential endeavor, the objective is to capture the interest of travellers and motivate them to embark on a tea trail. Beyond delivering an unforgettable experience for visitors, there is a belief that this emerging trend will foster the growth of the tea industry in India. The overarching aim is to advocate for sustainable and responsible tourism that not only benefits local communities but also preserves the natural beauty of tea gardens.

Although still in its early stages, tea tourism is generating enthusiasm among travellers who seek more than mere accommodation in a tea garden. This trend enables individuals not only to reside in a tea garden but actively participate in everyday tea-related activities, such as tea plucking, tastings, or leisurely strolls through the tea fields. In a world where individuals

yearn for respite from the frenetic pace of city life, tea tourism offers a serene escape and an opportunity to engage in activities that enrich life experiences.

Tourists engaging in tea tasting in India embark on an exclusive and immersive journey, delving into the country's rich tea history and cultural significance. The experience mirrors the familiar practice of wine tasting, involving the sampling of a diverse range of tea varieties, each characterized by its unique flavor, aroma, and appearance.

Participation in tea-tasting activities encompasses visits to tea estates and factories, offering a first-hand view of the entire tea production cycle from the plucking of leaves to the final packaging. Additionally, tourists can attend enlightening tea-tasting sessions, providing opportunities to sample various tea types and gain insights into the intricacies of tea brewing.

These sessions function as educational forums, offering tourists insights into diverse tea types, associated health benefits, and traditional tea-making techniques across different regions especially in Sikkim. The educational experience extends to brewing techniques and the etiquette associated with serving tea correctly, incorporating the use of teapots, cups, and other accessories.

A notable aspect of tea tasting in Sikkim is the captivating array of colored teas, each infused with its distinct flavor and aroma. India's globally acclaimed reputation for producing teas, such as Darjeeling, Assam, Sikkim (Organic), and Nilgiri varieties, is widely acknowledged and valued by tea enthusiasts worldwide.

In Sikkim, visitors have the opportunity to explore scenic tea estates and sample some of the world's premier organic teas. Assam, renowned for its robust and bold tea varieties, and Nilgiri, celebrated for its light and floral teas, offer unique regional specialties. An exceptional feature of tea tasting in India is the chance for interaction with local tea farmers and workers, generously sharing their knowledge and expertise on tea cultivation and processing. Tourists gain valuable insights into the challenges of tea farming, emphasizing factors like soil quality, weather conditions, and the necessary skills for producing high-quality tea.

2. Literature Review: Tea Tourism in India & Sikkim

Tea tourism has risen as a distinct form of tourism, garnering global attention by focusing on exploring tea plantations, culture, and production processes. Given India's status as a major tea producer, it provides a unique opportunity for tea tourism; however, research in this domain, particularly within the Indian context, remains scarce. This literature review delves into existing knowledge and underscores the potential contributions of tea tourism to local economies and communities.

The study by Kshetry, Vaidyanathan, and Athreya (2017)^[12] indirectly reveals the potential of tea plantations in northeastern India as habitats for wildlife. Although not specifically centered on tea tourism, this work underscores the ecological significance of tea plantations, suggesting a unique allure for nature and wildlife enthusiasts.

Antolak, *et al.* (2021)^[1] exploration of bioactive compounds in Kombucha Tea enhances the understanding of tea-related products, emphasizing potential health benefits linked with the symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeasts (SCOBY). While not directly tied to tourism, this research contributes to the knowledge base on tea-derived products.

Wang *et al.* (2019) investigation into soil-associated bacterial activity in tea plantations provides valuable insights into the environmental aspects of tea cultivation. Grasping the ecological impact of tea cultivation contributes to the broader context of sustainable tourism practices.

Magar and Kar's (2016)^[14] study in Assam spotlights the socio-cultural transformation spurred by tea tourism, emphasizing its role in boosting local economies and generating employment opportunities, showcasing its positive impact on communities. Mitra's (1991)^[17] exploration of problems and policies within the Indian tea industry offers historical insights into challenges faced by the sector. Understanding the industry's past provides context for evaluating its current state and potential for tourism.

Baruah's (2008)^[3] work furnishes a comprehensive overview of the tea industry's origin and development in Assam. This historical perspective aids in understanding the industry's evolution and its relevance to tourism. Sharma's (2003)^[22] focus on tea plantation workers in the Himalayan region sheds light on the human aspect of the tea industry. Grasping the labor dynamics is essential for comprehending the socio-economic impacts of tea tourism.

Siddaraju and Indira's (2013)^[23] study in Karnataka acknowledges the economic benefits of organic farming, a crucial perspective when assessing the impact of organic practices on tea cultivation and its potential resonance with tea tourism.

Dhama's (2010)^[7] mention of organic farming outperforming conventional farming in Sikkim underscores the potential benefits of sustainable practices, adding to the discourse on the impact of organic farming on tea cultivation. Singh's (2012)^[24] recognition of organic farming as a helpful strategy for small farmers contributes to understanding how sustainable practices can positively influence smaller stakeholders within the tea industry.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed suggests that tea tourism has the potential to significantly contribute to local economies and offer unique experiences for tourists. The integration of tea production with tourism, coupled with sustainable and organic practices, emerges as a promising avenue for the future development of the tea industry and its associated tourism sector. Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the specific characteristics, concepts, and activities of tea tourism in diverse regions of India, fostering a comprehensive understanding of its potential benefits and Activities.

3. Research Gap

The present study aims to address this gap by understanding how organic farming practices impact the green leaf output of tea in Sikkim and evaluating the overall performance and feasible tourism activities of the tea sector during the organic farming period. This literature review serves as a comprehensive foundation for the present study, providing insights into the diverse aspects of tea tourism, concepts, activities, and community livelihood sustainability in Sikkim.

4. Objectives

- To explore regional nuances in tea tourism concepts and distinguish unique characteristics within the context of Sikkim.

- To identify and scrutinize potential tourism activities within key tea-producing regions in Sikkim.

5. Methodology

The study is designed to undertake a descriptive fundamental research endeavor, delving into the diverse concepts and activities linked with tea tourism in India. Employing an exploratory and descriptive research approach, the study aims for an exhaustive examination of the multifaceted aspects of tea tourism. The qualitative nature of the research is aligned with the exploratory objective, enabling an inductive approach to reveal novel insights. Participant availability and willingness to share experiences may pose limitations to the study. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the research may constrain the generalizability of findings to a broader population.

This research methodology and design are geared towards fostering a holistic comprehension of tea tourism concepts and activities in India. Through the adoption of a qualitative, exploratory approach, the study endeavors to uncover the intricacies of tea tourism, contributing to the existing knowledge base, and promoting the cultural and experiential richness associated with this distinctive form of tourism.

6. Concepts of Tea Tourism

This research delves into the multifaceted dimensions of tea tourism, focusing on cultural immersion, agro-tourism, sustainable practices, heritage preservation, economic impact, tourist experiences, culinary exploration, public-private partnerships, destination marketing, and biodiversity conservation. Each concept is scrutinized for its unique contributions to the tea tourism industry, emphasizing the need for strategic integration and collaboration to ensure sustainable growth and responsible tourism practices. The study aims to provide insights that contribute to the development and promotion of tea-producing regions as compelling and environmentally responsible tourist destinations.

6.1 Cultural Immersion in Tea Tourism

Cultural immersion in tea tourism encompasses visitors' immersive experiences that facilitate engagement with and understanding of the local culture and traditions associated with tea production. Activities such as tea plucking and processing offer first hand insights into the rich cultural heritage intertwined with tea cultivation, emphasizing the creation of meaningful connections between tourists and the cultural aspects of tea-producing regions.

6.2 Agro-tourism in Tea Tourism

Agro-tourism within tea tourism involves integrating agricultural activities into the overall visitor experience, surpassing conventional sightseeing. Tourists actively participate in tea cultivation and processing through hands-on experiences, gaining a deeper appreciation for the agricultural processes involved in tea production. This approach contributes to a more immersive and educational tourism encounter.

6.3 Sustainable Tourism in Tea Tourism

Sustainable tourism in tea tourism emphasizes responsible practices to minimize the environmental impact of tourist activities and contribute to long-term social and economic benefits. Preserving natural resources, supporting local

communities, and promoting eco-friendly initiatives are crucial for ensuring the industry's viability for future generations.

6.4 Heritage Tourism in Tea Tourism

Heritage tourism in tea-producing regions focuses on the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural aspects related to tea cultivation. Encouraging the documentation and conservation of tea-related heritage sites, artifacts, and traditions allows visitors to gain insights into the evolution of tea cultivation practices, contributing to the appreciation and safeguarding of cultural heritage.

6.5 Culinary Tourism in Tea Tourism

Culinary tourism in tea tourism revolves around exploring and experiencing local tea-based culinary offerings and traditions. This concept enhances the overall tea tourism experience by appealing to the taste buds and providing a holistic exploration of local flavors.

6.6 Economic Impact of Tea Tourism

The economic impact of tea tourism examines the industry's influence on local economies, encompassing job creation, income generation, and support for local businesses within tea-producing regions. Tourism-related activities significantly contribute to the economic development of host communities.

6.7 Tourist Experience in Tea Tourism

The concept of the tourist experience in tea tourism encapsulates the overall journey and interactions visitors have during their time in tea-producing regions. Enhancing the tourist experience through hands-on activities, scenic beauty, cultural exchanges, and overall ambiance is crucial for creating memorable and enjoyable stays.

6.8 Public-Private Partnerships in Tea Tourism

Public-private partnerships in tea tourism involve collaborative efforts between government bodies and private entities to develop and promote tourism in tea-producing regions. Shared responsibilities, resources, and expertise are crucial for creating sustainable tourism practices, infrastructure, and promotional campaigns.

6.9 Destination Marketing in Tea Tourism

Destination marketing in tea tourism refers to strategic efforts aimed at promoting tea-producing regions as attractive tourist destinations. Crafting compelling narratives, utilizing various marketing channels, and highlighting unique selling points play a pivotal role in creating awareness, generating interest, and ultimately driving tourism to tea-producing areas.

6.10 Biodiversity Conservation in Tea Tourism

Biodiversity conservation in tea tourism underscores the importance of preserving the diverse ecosystems often found in and around tea plantations. Implementing practices that minimize the ecological impact of tourism activities and protect local flora and fauna contribute to the overall sustainability of the tea-producing environment, aligning tea tourism with broader environmental stewardship goals.

7. Potential Tea Tourism Activities

The research objective aims to systematically identify and thoroughly examine potential tourism activities prevalent in crucial tea-producing regions of Sikkim. The study intends

to provide comprehensive insights into the diverse opportunities and offerings within these key areas, contributing to a better understanding of the tourism landscape associated with tea production in Sikkim.

7.1 Tea Plucking Workshops

Conducting interactive sessions that enable tourists to actively participate in the traditional art of tea plucking. Participants receive hands-on experience under the guidance of local tea workers, gaining a nuanced understanding of the process and selection of tea leaves.

7.2 Tea Factory Tours

Guiding visitors through tea factories to offer a comprehensive overview of the entire tea production process. Tourists witness the transformation of freshly plucked leaves into the final packaged product, gaining insights into the intricacies of tea processing techniques.

7.3 Tea Tasting Seminars

Hosting educational sessions where tourists sample a diverse array of teas, learning about flavor profiles and brewing methods. Experts lead participants through a sensory journey, enriching their appreciation for the diverse world of tea.

7.4 Cultural Exchanges with Tea Farmers

Creating opportunities for tourists to engage in meaningful interactions with local tea farmers, fostering cultural exchanges. Discussions encompass traditional practices, daily life, and the cultural significance of tea cultivation, deepening the cultural immersion experience.

7.5 Scenic Tea Estate Walks

Facilitating leisurely walks through picturesque tea estates to provide an up-close view of the lush greenery. Tourists enjoy the serenity of tea fields, capturing the natural beauty and unique landscapes through a tranquil experience.

7.6 Tea-Infused Culinary Workshops

Organizing culinary sessions that explore the integration of tea in local dishes and beverages. Participants engage in the preparation and savoring of tea-infused delicacies, fostering a sensory connection between tea and gastronomy.

7.7 Tea Trail Cycling Tours

Guiding cycling tours along designated tea trails to allow tourists to explore expansive tea plantations. This physical activity is combined with an immersive experience, providing a unique perspective on the tea-producing region.

7.8 Traditional Tea Ceremonies

Enabling participation in traditional tea ceremonies featuring cultural rituals. Tourists witness and partake in ceremonies, gaining insights into the social and cultural significance deeply embedded in tea traditions.

7.9 Educational Workshops on Tea Culture

Conducting in-depth workshops covering the history, cultural significance, and regional variations of tea in India. Experts lead sessions on traditional tea-making techniques, tea etiquette, and the health benefits of different teas, providing a comprehensive educational experience.

7.10 Tea Garden Photography Tours

Offering guided photography tours that capture the scenic beauty of tea gardens. Participants receive tips on photographing tea landscapes, creating lasting memories and visual documentation of their visit.

7.11 Tea Boutique Shopping Experiences

Facilitating visits to on-site tea boutiques or markets for the purchase of locally produced teas and tea-related products. Tourists actively support local businesses while selecting souvenirs that encapsulate their tea tourism experience.

7.12 Tea Heritage Museum Visits

Encouraging exploration of museums dedicated to preserving the history and heritage of tea cultivation. Displays include artifacts, historical documents, and interactive exhibits, offering a comprehensive insight into the evolution of tea culture.

7.13 Tea and Yoga Retreats

Organizing immersive experiences that combine tea tourism with yoga and wellness activities. Tourists engage in yoga sessions amidst tea gardens, promoting relaxation and holistic well-being.

7.14 Tea-Blend Creation Workshops

Conducting hands-on sessions where tourists create personalized tea blends. Participants learn about tea blending techniques, selecting herbs and flavors to craft their unique tea blends.

7.15 Tea Literature Reading Sessions

Facilitating literary gatherings that explore books, poems, and writings related to tea. Tourists delve into the literary world of tea, enhancing their cultural understanding through shared readings.

7.16 Tea and Art Workshops

Organizing artistic sessions that combine tea appreciation with creative activities. Participants create art inspired by tea culture, fostering a unique intersection of art and tradition.

7.17 Tea-Related Cultural Performances

Presenting live performances featuring traditional music, dance, and drama related to tea culture. Tourists enjoy cultural entertainment, further immersing themselves in the regional tea experience.

7.18 Tea Plantation Stay Experiences

Offering accommodation options within tea plantations for an extended immersive stay. Tourists live amidst the tea fields, enjoying the tranquility and authenticity of the tea-producing region.

7.19 Tea and Ayurveda Retreats

Conducting retreats that combine tea experiences with Ayurvedic practices. Participants engage in holistic wellness activities, embracing the synergy between tea and Ayurveda.

7.20 Tea Sustainability Workshops

Hosting educational sessions focusing on sustainable practices in tea cultivation and tourism. Tourists learn about

environmentally friendly initiatives, actively supporting the industry's long-term viability through their participation.

8. Suggestions

Tea tourism in Sikkim offers a diverse range of engaging activities designed to immerse tourists in the enchanting world of tea.

- The Tea Plucking Workshops aim to provide a unique and intimate experience by immersing visitors in the daily lives of local tea workers. Through these workshops, tourists establish connections with the community, gaining an insider's perspective on the meticulous tea leaf selection process.
- Guided Tea Factory Tours delve into the intricacies of tea processing, from the initial plucking of leaves to the final packaging. These tours provide invaluable insights, highlighting the craftsmanship involved in producing high-quality tea.
- Educational Initiatives further enrich the cultural experience, offering Tea Tasting Seminars and facilitating Cultural Exchanges with Tea Farmers. These initiatives deepen cultural immersion by fostering meaningful dialogues about the region's rich tea cultivation practices.
- Scenic Tea Estate Walks and Tea Trail Cycling Tours promote physical activity while providing a unique perspective on the vast tea plantations. These activities showcase the ecological elements of tea cultivation, allowing tourists to appreciate the harmony between nature and tea production. For culinary enthusiasts, Tea-Infused Culinary Workshops foster a sensory connection between tea and gastronomy.
- Traditional Tea Ceremonies vividly portray the cultural fabric of Sikkim, covering the history, cultural significance, and regional variations of tea in India.
- Educational Workshops on Tea Culture provide additional insights into the historical and cultural dimensions of tea.
- Tea Garden Photography Tours add an element of exploration, allowing tourists to capture visual memories and support local businesses.
- Tea Boutique Shopping Experiences engage tourists with local businesses, offering opportunities to purchase tea-related products and souvenirs.
- The Tea Heritage Museum Visits contribute to preserving the history and heritage of tea cultivation, providing a comprehensive insight into the evolution of tea culture.
- The intersection of tea tourism with wellness is highlighted in activities like Tea and Yoga Retreats, offering holistic well-being through the therapeutic benefits of tea and yoga.
- Additionally, Tea and Ayurveda Retreats combine the therapeutic benefits of tea with Ayurvedic practices, providing a comprehensive wellness experience for tourists.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of tea tourism in Sikkim has uncovered a diverse array of distinctive concepts and activities that enrich the multifaceted experience for tourists. Positioned as an emerging center for tea tourism, Sikkim's unspoiled landscapes, cultural heritage, and thriving tea estates provide a departure from conventional travel norms.

Sikkim's commitment to sustainability is evident in Tea Sustainability Workshops, where tourists actively participate in educational sessions focusing on sustainable practices in both tea cultivation and tourism. In essence, Sikkim's tea tourism offerings seamlessly blend cultural, ecological, and educational elements, catering to varied interests while contributing to the sustainable development of the region.

As a prominent destination for tea tourism, Sikkim establishes a benchmark for immersive and responsible practices, intertwining history, culture, and nature in a journey that resonates with tea enthusiasts.

9.1 Future Research

However, addressing knowledge gaps and exploring various facets of tea tourism in India, including quantitative analysis, tourist motivations, sustainability practices, marketing strategies, and policy improvements, requires further research. Such efforts will enhance the development and promotion of tea tourism in India, elevating its economic and cultural significance.

Tea tourism in Sikkim has the potential to bolster community livelihood sustainability by integrating tea production and consumption with tourism. While there are several benefits associated with tea tourism, such as enhanced livelihood diversity and choice, challenges and impacts, including limited integration, environmental concerns, and potential social inequalities, need to be addressed.

Mitigating these challenges and knowledge gaps necessitates further research and the development of sustainable practices, governance frameworks, and policies supporting the growth of tea tourism in Sikkim. Through these measures, tea tourism can substantially contribute to the economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability of the region.

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